



The Inner Development Guide for Teams

Practices for Building Collective Capabilities

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Preface

This handbook offers practical resources for developing the Inner Development Guide skills and qualities as collective capabilities in teams, units, and departments. It is not meant to be read from beginning to end, but rather used as a resource library, consulted when specific needs arise or when exploring how to strengthen particular aspects of how a team works together.

The handbook is written primarily for first-line managers, team leaders, and department heads who want to strengthen their team's capacity to work well together and contribute meaningfully to their organization's aspirations in line with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and similar concerns. It is also intended for HR professionals, coaches, and consultants supporting team development.

Due to its comprehensiveness, a team leader might benefit from guidance on how to navigate the resources—from a coach, an HR consultant, or someone else who has studied the material extensively. As a help for getting an overview and navigate among the scaffolds you can use the webbapp at this link: <https://idg.thomasjordan.se/idg-team-scaffolds-webapp.html>. Another possibility is to use the chatbot *Inner Development Guide: Development Activities* (see the website idg.thomasjordan.se and Chapter 1), which can help identify relevant scaffolds for specific situations.

We assume the reader has at least some familiarity with the Inner Development Guide framework and is looking for ways to work with the IDGs at team or department level.

The handbook was written in close collaboration between me, Thomas Jordan, and the large language model Claude (an AI system from Anthropic). This collaboration made it possible to develop, test, and refine the extensive material through an iterative process that would otherwise have required far more time.

I have a background as a senior lecturer and associate professor at Gothenburg University, Sweden, where I worked for nearly 40 years before leaving in early 2024. My doctorate is in economic geography, but I have worked in the field of adult development research since the mid-1980s. I served as scientific consultant and lead analyst for the IDG initiative during the development of the original Inner Development Goals framework in 2021, and was again actively involved in updating the framework to the Inner Development Guide in 2025.

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PART I

Introduction and Foundations

1. Introduction

Purpose of this handbook

This handbook is written for team leaders, first-line managers, department heads, and others who want to strengthen their team's capacity to work well together, handle challenges, and contribute meaningfully to their organisation's goals.

It draws on the framework Inner Development Guide (IDG), which identifies 25 skills and qualities that help people address complex challenges—whether in sustainability, organisational change, or everyday work life (for an overview, see Appendix A).

The IDG framework was developed through extensive international consultation and research, involving over 21,000 people from 194 countries. It organises 25 skills and qualities into five dimensions: Being (cultivating our inner life), Thinking (understanding complexity), Relating (caring for others and the world), Collaborating (building trust and working together), and Acting (leading and enabling change).

While the skills and qualities in the Inner Development Guide are valuable for any team, the framework itself was developed with a specific purpose in mind: enabling people and organisations to effectively address the complex global challenges outlined in the UN's Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals. Whether your team works directly on sustainability, social justice, public health, education, or any other sector, developing these collective capabilities increases your team's ability to contribute constructively to larger purposes beyond your immediate organisational goals.

This handbook therefore serves two interconnected aims: helping your team work more effectively together, and enabling your team to contribute more meaningfully to the complex challenges that matter for the future of people and planet.

The purpose of this handbook is practical: to provide you with concrete structures, routines, and practices that you can implement at the team or unit level to develop these 25 skills and qualities as collective capabilities. The emphasis is on what you can do within your sphere of influence, without requiring organisation-wide change initiatives or extensive resources.

The key insight: from individual skills to collective capability

A central premise of this handbook is that individual skills do not automatically translate into collective capability. You may have team members who are individually skilled at critical thinking, empathy, or collaboration—yet the team as a whole may struggle to think critically together, to care for one another, or to collaborate effectively. This gap between individual competence and collective capability is common, and it is not primarily a training problem.

Consider a team where several members have strong systems thinking skills. They can each see patterns and interconnections when analyzing a problem on their own. Yet when the team comes together to make decisions, the discussion follows familiar scripts, focuses on immediate concerns, and produces linear action plans that ignore the very complexities individual

members can see. The collective capability for systems thinking has not emerged, even though the individual skills are present.

This capacity to think systemically together becomes especially important when teams work on challenges related to sustainability, social equity, public health, or other SDG-related domains. These challenges are inherently systemic—they cannot be understood or addressed through linear thinking. Teams that can think systemically together can contribute more effectively to these larger purposes.

Why does this happen? Because collective capability depends not only on what individuals know and can do, but on how the team is structured, how meetings are run, what norms govern interaction, and what practices are in place to draw out and integrate individual contributions. Without the right structures and practices, individual skills remain trapped at the individual level.

This insight has important implications. It means that developing collective capability requires deliberate work on structures and practices, not just individual training. It also means that relatively small changes in how a team operates—a new meeting format, a regular reflection practice, a simple role assignment—can unlock capabilities that were always present but never expressed. This is good news for team leaders: you have more influence over your team's collective capability than you might think.

What this handbook offers

This handbook provides concrete, implementable formats—what we call “scaffolds”—for building each of the 25 IDG skills and qualities as collective capabilities at the team or department level. A scaffold is a recurring structure or practice that creates the conditions for a particular capability to emerge and strengthen over time. Scaffolds might include meeting formats, reflection routines, role assignments, feedback mechanisms, or decision protocols.

The emphasis throughout is on practices that can be institutionalized—made into regular, recurring features of how the team works—rather than one-time activities. For a fuller discussion of why structural scaffolds are more powerful than one-time interventions, see Chapter 3.

For each of the 25 skills and qualities, the handbook offers a brief explanation of what that quality means as a collective capability (not just an individual skill), why it matters at the team level, and two to four concrete scaffolds with implementation guidance.

The scaffolds are presented as examples to be adapted to your specific context (see Chapter 2 for detailed guidance on adaptation).

The handbook is very comprehensive, it comprises no less than 90 scaffolds. You can get an overview and browse among the scaffolds in this webapp: <https://idg.thomasjordan.se/idg-team-scaffolds-webapp.html>

If you find it too challenging to navigate all the IDGs and all the scaffolds, there is a convenient alternative. There is a chatbot (in ChatGPT) called *Inner Development Guide: Development activities* which is loaded with this handbook and a lot of other source material. You can use this chatbot to find practices, “scaffolds”, strategies, activities, etc. that are specifically adapted to your team’s particular situation and needs. You will find the chatbot on this website: idg.thomasjordan.se. The website also offers a lot of other material related to the IDG framework.

Who this handbook is for

This handbook is primarily written for first-line managers and team leaders who have direct responsibility for a team or unit and want to strengthen how that team works together. It assumes you have some degree of autonomy to shape meeting formats, introduce new practices, and influence team norms—even if you operate within larger organisational constraints.

The handbook is also relevant for department heads overseeing larger units (30–50 people or more), internal coaches and HR partners supporting team development, external consultants working with teams on collaboration and effectiveness, and change agents seeking to build collective capability without requiring top-down organisational mandates.

The handbook is sector-neutral: the scaffolds described here can be applied in private companies, public sector organisations, and non-governmental organisations. While specific adaptations will be needed for different contexts, the underlying principles apply broadly.

2. How to use this handbook

Team size: small teams and larger departments

The scaffolds in this handbook are designed to work at different scales, but the appropriate approach varies depending on whether you are working with a small team (roughly 5–15 people) or a larger department (30–50 people or more).

In small teams, you can typically implement practices that involve the whole team directly. Everyone can participate in the same reflection rounds, the same retrospectives, the same dialogue sessions. The team leader can facilitate most practices personally, and the relational dynamics are manageable because people know each other well.

In larger departments, direct involvement of everyone in every practice becomes impractical. Instead, you may need to work through sub-teams or workgroups, create cascading practices where team leaders at different levels implement similar structures, use representative formats where a subset of people participate on behalf of the larger group, or combine whole-department gatherings (less frequent) with sub-team practices (more frequent). Throughout the handbook, notes are provided where significant adaptations are needed for larger units.

Adapting the suggested formats

The scaffolds presented in this handbook are examples, not rigid prescriptions. They are described in enough detail to be implementable, but they are intended to be adapted to your specific context. Several factors will shape how you modify these practices.

Your team's current culture matters significantly. If your team already has strong norms around open dialogue, some scaffolds will feel natural and can be implemented quickly. If your team has a more reserved or hierarchical culture, you may need to introduce practices more gradually and in modified form. Starting with lower-stakes practices and building toward more demanding ones often works better than attempting dramatic cultural shifts.

The nature of your work also shapes adaptation. Teams doing highly interdependent work may benefit most from scaffolds that strengthen coordination and mutual understanding. Teams doing more independent work may prioritize scaffolds that create periodic connection points and shared learning opportunities. Teams facing rapidly changing conditions may emphasize adaptability and learning practices, while teams doing steady-state operations may focus more on quality and continuous improvement.

Available time and resources will constrain what is feasible. Some scaffolds require significant time investment; others can be integrated into existing meetings with minimal additional time. Be realistic about what your team can sustain. A simple practice done consistently is more valuable than an elaborate practice that is abandoned after a few attempts.

As a general principle, involve your team in adapting scaffolds. Present the underlying purpose of a practice, share the suggested format as a starting point, and invite input on how to modify it to fit your context. This co-design process not only produces better-adapted practices but also builds ownership and commitment.

Starting points: assessing which IDGs to prioritize

The handbook covers all 25 IDG skills and qualities, but it is not a good idea to work on all of them simultaneously. In fact, trying to implement too many new practices at once is likely to

overwhelm your team and reduce the effectiveness of each. A more productive approach is to identify a few areas to prioritize based on your team's current needs and opportunities.

Several approaches can help you identify priorities. One is to reflect on recurring challenges. What problems come up repeatedly in your team? Where do things tend to break down? If conflicts simmer unresolved, the Relating dimension (particularly empathy, forgiveness, and communication skills) may be a priority. If decisions are made hastily without considering consequences, the Thinking dimension (critical thinking, systems thinking, long-term orientation) may be relevant. If the team struggles to maintain momentum on longer-term initiatives, the Acting dimension (resilience, hope, proactivity) may need attention.

Another approach is to consider upcoming challenges. What does your team need to be good at in the coming period? If you are entering a phase requiring significant collaboration with other units, prioritizing Collaborating scaffolds makes sense. If you are facing strategic uncertainty requiring creative problem-solving, Thinking scaffolds may be most valuable.

You can also build on existing strengths. If your team already has strong practices in one area, extending and deepening those practices may yield quick results. Alternatively, you might identify a weakness that, if addressed, would have ripple effects across multiple areas. Psychological safety, for instance, is foundational for many other capabilities; investing in scaffolds that build safety can enable progress on multiple fronts.

A simple self-assessment process is provided in Part III of this handbook to help you and your team identify priorities together. However, you do not need a formal assessment to get started. Your own observations and judgment as a team leader, combined with input from team members, are often sufficient to identify productive starting points.

Implementation advice: start small, build gradually

When introducing new practices, a gradual approach typically works better than attempting comprehensive change. Start with one or two scaffolds that address a clear need and are relatively easy to implement. Give these practices time to take root before adding more. As the team becomes accustomed to working in new ways, additional practices can be layered in.

Involve the team in selecting and adapting practices. Explain the purpose of a proposed scaffold, present the suggested format, and invite discussion about how to adapt it.

Be explicit about experimentation. Frame new practices as experiments that you will try for a defined period and then evaluate together. This lowers the stakes—it is easier to try something knowing it can be adjusted or discontinued—and creates a natural opportunity for reflection and learning.

Treat all new practices as experiments rather than implementations. After trying a practice for 4–6 cycles, explicitly assess: Is it producing the intended effect? Is it sustainable with current team energy? What's working that should be kept? What's not working that should be changed or dropped? This experimental mindset recognizes that scaffolds are hypotheses to be tested, not solutions to be implemented. What works for one team may not work for another, and even practices that work initially may need adjustment over time.

Protect time for new practices. One of the most common reasons practices fail to take hold is that they get squeezed out by other demands. If you decide a practice is important enough to implement, protect the time for it. This may mean removing or shortening other activities to

make room. A practice that is consistently skipped or rushed sends a message that it is not actually a priority.

Be patient with uneven adoption. Not everyone will embrace new practices immediately. Some team members will engage enthusiastically; others will be skeptical or slow to participate. This is normal. Consistent, patient modeling by the team leader, combined with genuine responsiveness to concerns, usually brings skeptics along over time. Avoid forcing participation in ways that create resentment.

The role of the team leader

As a team leader, you play several roles in developing collective capability. Each of these roles matter, and neglecting any one of them can undermine the effectiveness of the practices you introduce.

Modeling is perhaps the most powerful role. Team members watch what you do more than what you say. If you introduce a practice for reflection but never genuinely reflect yourself, the practice will feel hollow. If you ask for honest feedback but react defensively when you receive it, people will stop giving honest feedback. Your own behavior sets the tone for what is possible and expected in the team.

Facilitating means creating the conditions for practices to work. This includes designing and introducing scaffolds, guiding the team through new practices until they become familiar, managing dynamics that might derail a practice (such as one person dominating discussion), and adjusting practices based on how they are working. Good facilitation does not mean controlling everything—it means holding the structure while allowing genuine participation within it.

Protecting time is essential. Practices require time, and time is always scarce. As team leader, you have some control over how time is allocated. Protecting time for important practices—even when other demands press—signals their importance and ensures they can actually happen. This may require difficult trade-offs, but without protected time, practices will not take root.

Maintaining consistency keeps practices alive over time. It is easy to introduce a new practice with enthusiasm, only to let it lapse after a few weeks when the novelty wears off or other priorities intrude. Collective capability develops through consistent practice over extended periods. Your role is to maintain rhythm and continuity, ensuring practices continue even when they are no longer new and exciting.

Reflecting and adjusting means paying attention to how practices are working and making thoughtful modifications. No practice works perfectly from the start. Your ongoing attention to what is and is not working—and your willingness to adjust based on experience—is what allows practices to improve and remain relevant over time.

3. Core principles for scaffolding collective capabilities

The principles outlined in this chapter guide the approach taken throughout this handbook. These principles emerge from an understanding that the challenges teams are called to address—whether in sustainability, social justice, organisational transformation, or other domains—are complex and interconnected. Building collective capability to navigate such complexity is not merely about improving team functioning; it is about enabling teams to contribute more effectively to addressing the urgent challenges facing humanity and the living Earth.

Before exploring the specific scaffolds for each IDG dimension, it is helpful to understand some core principles that underlie the approach taken in this handbook. These principles explain why certain kinds of practices are emphasized and provide guidance for adapting scaffolds to your context.

3.1 Structural scaffolds vs. one-time interventions

This handbook emphasizes recurring, institutionalized practices rather than one-time interventions. The distinction matters because collective capability is built through repetition and consistency, not through isolated events.

A one-time intervention might be a team-building workshop, an off-site retreat, or a facilitated dialogue session. These can be valuable—they can introduce new ideas, create memorable experiences, and shift perspectives. But their effects typically fade within weeks unless they are followed by ongoing practices that reinforce and extend what was learned.

A structural scaffold, by contrast, is a recurring practice built into the team’s regular way of working. It might be a ten-minute reflection round at the end of each week, a monthly retrospective with a consistent format, or a standing agenda item for surfacing concerns. Because it recurs, it gradually shapes team culture. People come to expect it, prepare for it, and internalize the behaviors it encourages.

The power of structural scaffolds lies in their cumulative effect. A single appreciation round has modest impact. But fifty-two appreciation rounds over the course of a year—each one brief, each one building on the last—can fundamentally shift how team members see each other and relate to their work. The practice becomes part of “how we do things here,” which is the essence of culture change.

This does not mean one-time interventions are worthless. They can be useful for introducing concepts, addressing specific issues, or creating shared experiences. But they are supplements to ongoing structural practices, not substitutes for them. The scaffolds in this handbook are designed to be institutionalized—to become regular features of team life that persist over time.

3.2 The interplay between individual skills and collective practices

As discussed in Chapter 1, individual skills and collective capability are distinct but interdependent. Individual skills provide the raw material for collective capability, but they only become collective capability when structures and practices enable their expression.

This handbook focuses primarily on the structural and practice side—the scaffolds that enable individual skills to become collective capability. However, it’s worth noting that as teams engage in new practices, individual skills often develop as well. The practice teaches the skill.

There is also a diagnostic implication: when a team struggles with a particular capability, consider whether the problem is insufficient individual skill, inadequate structures and practices, or both. For a fuller discussion of this distinction, see Chapter 1, section ‘The key insight: from individual skills to collective capability.’

3.3 Psychological safety as a foundation

Psychological safety—the belief that one can speak up, ask questions, admit mistakes, and offer ideas without fear of punishment or humiliation—is foundational for many of the scaffolds in this handbook. Without sufficient psychological safety, practices that require vulnerability, honesty, or risk-taking will not function as intended.

Consider a reflection practice where team members are invited to share what they learned from a recent failure. If team members fear that admitting failure will be held against them in performance evaluations or informal judgments, they will share cautiously or not at all. The practice becomes performative—people say what they think they should say rather than what they actually think. The potential value of the practice is lost.

Or consider a practice for surfacing concerns or disagreements. If voicing disagreement leads to being labeled as “not a team player” or creates conflict with the team leader, people will stay silent. Important information will not surface, and decisions will be made on incomplete understanding of risks and alternatives.

Psychological safety is not the same as being comfortable or avoiding difficult conversations. A psychologically safe team can have challenging discussions precisely because people trust that disagreement will not be punished. Safety enables productive discomfort.

Building psychological safety is a gradual process that depends heavily on leader behavior. As a team leader, you build safety by responding non-defensively to questions and challenges, acknowledging your own mistakes and uncertainties, thanking people for raising concerns (even uncomfortable ones), following through when people report problems, and refraining from punishing or marginalizing those who disagree.

If your team currently has low psychological safety, you may need to prioritize building safety before implementing scaffolds that require significant vulnerability. Starting with lower-stakes practices and consistently demonstrating that participation is safe will gradually build the foundation for more demanding practices.

3.4 Time and rhythm: how regular practices create cultural shifts

Collective capability develops through practices repeated over time. The rhythm of repetition—how frequently practices occur and how they fit into the team’s temporal structure—matters significantly for their effectiveness.

Different practices have different natural rhythms. Brief check-ins or reflection moments might occur daily or at each meeting. More substantive retrospectives might occur weekly, biweekly, or monthly. Deeper reflection on team purpose or values might occur quarterly or annually. Matching the frequency to the nature of the practice is important: too frequent, and the practice becomes tedious or superficial; too infrequent, and it fails to build momentum or become embedded in team culture.

Consistency is more important than frequency. A monthly practice that happens reliably every month will have more impact than a weekly practice that is frequently skipped or rescheduled.

Predictability allows people to prepare mentally and practically, and it signals that the practice is genuinely valued rather than optional.

Building practices into existing rhythms often works better than creating entirely new time commitments. If the team already has a weekly meeting, adding a ten-minute reflection segment is easier than scheduling a separate reflection session. If there is already a monthly all-hands gathering, including an appreciation practice is easier than creating a new monthly appreciation meeting. Working with existing rhythms reduces friction and increases the likelihood that practices will persist.

Over time, practices shape culture. What happens regularly comes to be seen as “normal”—as “the way we do things here.” This normalisation is the goal. When a reflection practice feels like a natural part of how the team works rather than an imposed activity, it has been successfully institutionalized. Reaching this point typically requires patience: expect several months of consistent practice before new practices feel fully embedded.

3.5 What team leaders can do independently

A key premise of this handbook is that team leaders can implement many scaffolds within their own sphere of influence, without requiring organisation-wide change initiatives or approval from higher levels. This is important because waiting for organisational transformation often means waiting indefinitely, and meanwhile the team’s potential goes unrealized.

Most scaffolds that operate within existing meeting structures and time allocations can be implemented independently. If you have authority to shape how your team’s meetings are run, you can introduce new agenda elements, meeting formats, and facilitation approaches without requiring external approval. This includes most of the scaffolds in this handbook.

Practices involving only your team and not requiring new resources are typically within your control. You can create norms, introduce role assignments, establish feedback mechanisms, and shape team culture in significant ways without formal organisational mandate. The primary requirements are your own commitment, your team’s willingness to engage, and the time within your existing allocation.

Some scaffolds may require coordination beyond your team. Practices involving other departments, significant new time commitments that affect productivity expectations, or resources beyond your budget may require conversation with your own manager or other stakeholders. The handbook notes where such coordination is likely to be needed.

There are also scaffolds that work best when supported by broader organisational culture or systems. For instance, practices that reward risk-taking are easier to sustain if the organisation’s performance management system does not punish failure. Practices that encourage honest feedback work better if there are not strong organisational norms against open disagreement. Where such tensions exist, you may need to work around organisational constraints, explicitly discuss the tension with your team, or accept that some practices will be harder to implement until organisational conditions change.

The good news is that team-level practices can sometimes influence broader organisational culture. A team that develops strong collaborative practices may become a model for other teams. Practices that work well at team level may be adopted more broadly. Your investment in your team’s collective capability can have ripple effects beyond the team itself.

3.6 Recognising what's complex vs. what's complicated in team work

Not everything about teams is complex. Some aspects are merely complicated—they can be analyzed and addressed with expertise and good process. Others are genuinely complex—they emerge from interactions and cannot be predicted or controlled directly.

Complicated aspects of team work (can be planned and implemented): meeting schedules and logistics, information systems and tools, role definitions and reporting structures, skill training for known techniques, and process documentation.

For these, the scaffolds in this handbook can often be implemented fairly directly. Best practices exist and can be adapted.

Complex aspects of team work (must be navigated and enabled): trust and psychological safety, actual vs. espoused culture, how team members actually make sense of ambiguous situations, patterns of influence and informal power, what people genuinely care about vs. what they say in public, and whether practices become alive or hollow.

For these, scaffolds are hypotheses to be tested, not solutions to be implemented. They create conditions that may enable desired capabilities to emerge, but cannot guarantee it.

Practical implications: First, for complicated aspects, implement with attention to context but reasonable confidence. If it doesn't work, the issue is usually in execution or fit, and can be debugged. Second, for complex aspects, probe carefully with safe-to-fail experiments. If it doesn't work, the issue may be that the system's current state doesn't afford this change—and no amount of better implementation will fix it. Third, don't confuse the two: treating complex aspects as complicated leads to frustration (“we implemented it correctly, why isn't it working?”). Treating complicated aspects as complex leads to unnecessary uncertainty.

Most scaffolds in this handbook address complex aspects of team capability. This means: expect surprises and unintended consequences, watch for what's actually happening rather than just what you intended, be ready to adjust or abandon based on what you observe, and value learning over fidelity to the original design.

How the rest of the handbook is organised

Part II of this handbook presents scaffolds for each of the five IDG dimensions: Being, Thinking, Relating, Collaborating, and Acting. Each dimension contains five skills and qualities (25 in total). For each skill or quality, you will find a brief explanation of what it means as a collective capability, why it matters at team level, and two to four concrete scaffolds with implementation guidance.

Part III addresses implementation: how to assess your team's needs, how to sustain and evolve practices over time, and how to work within organisational constraints. Appendices provide quick reference summaries and additional resources.

You may read the handbook straight through or go directly to the dimensions most relevant to your current priorities. Each section is designed to be useful on its own while fitting into the larger whole. Wherever you begin, the core principles outlined in this first part provide the foundation for effective implementation.

PART II

The Five Dimensions: Scaffolds for Collective Capability

Introduction to Part II

This part of the handbook presents concrete scaffolds for building each of the 25 IDG skills and qualities as collective capabilities at the team level. The material is organised according to the five dimensions of the IDG framework: Being, Thinking, Relating, Collaborating, and Acting. Each dimension contains five skills and qualities.

As noted in the introduction, the IDG framework was developed with the UN's Agenda 2030 and Sustainable Development Goals in mind. The scaffolds presented here serve two interconnected purposes: helping your team work more effectively together, and enabling your team to contribute more meaningfully to complex challenges—whether directly related to sustainability, social equity, public health, or other pressing concerns. The capabilities developed through these practices are exactly what is needed for teams working on challenges that are systemic, long-term, and require collaboration across boundaries.

How this part is organised

For each skill or quality, you will find:

A description of what this quality means as a collective capability. The IDG framework originally describes these skills and qualities in terms of individual capacities. Here, we translate each into what it looks like when a team or unit possesses the capability collectively—not just as a sum of individual skills, but as an emergent property of how the team works together.

Why it matters at team level. A brief explanation of why this collective capability is valuable for team effectiveness, and what problems arise when it is absent.

Two to five concrete scaffolds. Each scaffold is a recurring practice, structure, or routine that creates conditions for the collective capability to develop and strengthen over time. Scaffolds are described in enough detail to be implementable, while recognising that adaptation to your specific context is essential.

Each scaffold description includes the purpose of the practice, a suggested starting point (including format, frequency, and process), guidance for the team leader's role, and notes on adaptation for different team sizes or contexts where relevant.

Connections to other IDGs. The 25 skills and qualities are interconnected. Many scaffolds serve multiple qualities simultaneously. Where significant overlap exists, cross-references help you see how practices reinforce each other.

Guidance for when scaffolds aren't working. Each dimension chapter ends with a section addressing what to do when the suggested scaffolds don't take hold. This guidance helps you diagnose whether the issue lies in implementation, in missing foundational conditions, or in constraints that require different approaches. Not every scaffold will work for every team, and these sections help you navigate when to persist, when to adapt, and when to try something entirely different.

An experimental approach

The scaffolds presented here are examples, not prescriptions. They represent practices that have proven useful in various team contexts, but they are not the only ways to build these capabilities. More importantly, they should be treated as *hypotheses to be tested* rather than solutions to be implemented.

This experimental mindset is important because much of what these scaffolds address is genuinely complex—in the technical sense of involving emergent properties that cannot be predicted or controlled directly. Trust, psychological safety, actual versus espoused culture, how team members make sense of ambiguous situations, what people genuinely care about—these aspects of team life cannot be engineered like a process or installed like software. Scaffolds create conditions that may enable desired capabilities to emerge, but cannot guarantee it.

For this reason, after trying a practice for four to six cycles, explicitly assess: Is it producing the intended effect? Is it sustainable with current team energy? What's working that should be kept? What's not working that should be changed or dropped? This assessment should inform whether you continue, modify, or discontinue the practice. What works for one team may not work for another, and even practices that work initially may need adjustment over time.

Use the scaffolds as starting points for designing practices suited to your team. Some will fit your context well; others will need significant modification; some may not be appropriate at all. Your judgement, combined with input from your team, is the best guide to what will work in your specific situation.

Where to start

You do not need to implement scaffolds for all 25 qualities. In fact, trying to work on too many areas simultaneously is likely to overwhelm your team and reduce the effectiveness of each practice. Start with the areas most relevant to your team's current needs, implement a few practices well, and build from there. A small number of well-established practices will have more impact than many practices implemented superficially.

Consider also your team's current energy and capacity. A team that has recently been through major stress, reorganisation, or demanding projects may need time to recover before taking on ambitious new practices. Sometimes the most important development is rest. Part III of this handbook provides more detailed guidance on assessing your team's needs and sequencing implementation sustainably.

As you read through the scaffolds for each dimension, you may find that certain practices resonate immediately while others seem less relevant. Trust that initial response—your sense of what your team needs is likely more accurate than any framework's prescription. At the same time, remain open to discovering that capabilities you had not prioritised turn out to be foundational for those you want to develop. The IDG dimensions are deeply interconnected, and progress in one area often enables progress in others.

4. Being — Cultivating our inner life as a team

The Being dimension addresses the foundational qualities that shape how a team relates to its purpose, its values, and its own patterns of behavior. At the individual level, Being encompasses inner compass, integrity and authenticity, openness and learning mindset, self-awareness, and presence. At the team level, these qualities manifest as shared purpose and direction, alignment between stated and enacted values, collective learning capacity, awareness of team patterns, and the ability to be genuinely present and responsive together.

Teams that develop collective capability in the Being dimension have a clear sense of why they exist and what they are working toward—including how their work connects to challenges and purposes beyond the team itself. They notice when their actions contradict their stated values and work to close that gap. They learn from experience rather than repeating the same mistakes, and they remain open to perspectives from outside the team that might challenge their assumptions. They can observe their own patterns—how they make decisions, how they handle conflict, how they respond to pressure—and adjust when those patterns are not serving them well. They can slow down when needed, attend to what is actually happening, and respond thoughtfully rather than react automatically.

These capabilities may sound abstract, but they have concrete effects on team performance and impact. A team without shared sense of purpose drifts, with members pulling in different directions. A team that cannot reflect on its own patterns keeps stumbling over the same obstacles. A team that operates on autopilot misses important signals and opportunities—including signals about how its work affects stakeholders, communities, and the environment. The scaffolds in this section help teams develop the reflective capacity that underlies sustained effectiveness and meaningful contribution to larger purposes.

These foundational capabilities in the Being dimension are particularly important for teams working toward long-term goals such as the Sustainable Development Goals. Sustaining commitment to goals that may take years or decades to achieve requires a strong sense of shared purpose, alignment between values and action, continuous learning from experience, and the capacity to remain present and responsive even when progress is difficult to see. Teams that cultivate these qualities are better equipped to persist through difficulty and to notice when their approach needs to change.

4.1 Inner compass — Shared purpose and direction

What it means as a collective capability

At the individual level, inner compass refers to a deeply felt commitment to live and act in accordance with values and purposes that serve the good of the whole. At the team level, inner compass becomes a shared sense of purpose—a collective understanding of why the team exists, what it is ultimately trying to accomplish, and what values guide its work. This is more than a mission statement on paper; it is a living sense of direction that team members feel connected to and that influences daily decisions and priorities.

A team with collective inner compass understands not only what it is trying to achieve, but also how its work connects to larger purposes beyond its immediate organisational goals. This includes awareness of how the team's work affects stakeholders, communities, and the environment—both positively and negatively. The team's sense of purpose encompasses not just effectiveness but responsibility.

Why it matters at team level

A team with a strong shared inner compass can navigate ambiguity and make decisions even when explicit guidance is lacking, because members understand what the team is fundamentally trying to achieve. When priorities conflict, a shared sense of purpose helps the team make trade-offs. When circumstances change, the team can adapt its approach while maintaining strategic direction. Without shared purpose, teams tend to drift, with different members optimizing for different goals. Energy dissipates into internal negotiation about what matters, and the team becomes reactive rather than purposeful.

Shared inner compass also helps teams maintain alignment between their immediate work and their broader responsibilities. Teams working in any sector—private, public, or non-profit—exist within larger social and ecological systems. A clear sense of purpose that includes these connections helps the team make decisions that serve not only immediate organisational goals but also the wellbeing of those affected by the team's work.

Scaffolds

Scaffold 1: Quarterly purpose reflection dialogue

Purpose: To keep the team's sense of purpose alive and connected to daily work, rather than letting it become a forgotten statement. This practice creates regular opportunities to revisit why the team exists, how it contributes to the world, and what it is ultimately working toward—including its relationship to larger challenges such as environmental sustainability and social responsibility.

Format: Once per quarter, dedicate 60–90 minutes to a structured dialogue focused on team purpose. This can be part of a regular team meeting or a separate session. The dialogue addresses questions such as:

- What is our team's core purpose—the fundamental reason we exist?
- How does our work contribute to purposes beyond our immediate organisational goals? How might our work contribute to—or detract from—environmental sustainability, social wellbeing, or other larger concerns?
- How has our recent work connected to that purpose? Where have we been most aligned with it, and where have we drifted?
- Who benefits from our work? Who might be negatively affected by what we do or how we do it?
- Looking ahead, what should we prioritize to stay true to our purpose?

Begin with a few minutes of individual reflection, allowing each person to consider these questions before discussion. Then open dialogue, inviting contributions without forcing everyone to speak in turn. The team leader facilitates by keeping the discussion focused on purpose rather than operational details, and by drawing out quieter voices. Conclude by identifying one or two insights or commitments to carry forward into the next quarter.

Team leader role: Prepare by reflecting on these questions yourself beforehand. Model genuine reflection rather than having pre-packaged answers. Facilitate the dialogue without dominating it. Ensure the conversation stays at the level of purpose and meaning rather than sliding into operational problem-solving. Document key insights and refer back to them in subsequent weeks.

Adaptation: For larger departments, this dialogue can be conducted in sub-teams, with a synthesis session where representatives share insights across groups. Alternatively, the department head can facilitate a whole-department session using a format where small groups discuss and then share key points with the larger group.

Scaffold 2: Purpose connection moments

Purpose: To maintain a thread between daily work and larger purpose, so that purpose remains present rather than being forgotten between quarterly dialogues.

Format: At the beginning or end of regular team meetings (weekly or biweekly), include a brief moment (3–5 minutes) connecting to purpose. This can take different forms, rotated or varied over time: one team member shares a recent moment when they felt the team's work was particularly meaningful or connected to larger purposes and values; the team leader briefly highlights how a current priority connects to the team's larger goals or to the needs of those the team serves; or a simple opening question asks team members to name one word that describes how they are feeling about the team's direction.

Occasionally, this moment can be used to bring in an external perspective: sharing feedback from a stakeholder about how the team's work has affected them, or noting a development in the wider world that connects to what the team does.

This practice works best when it is genuine and varied rather than formulaic. If it becomes a rote exercise, its value diminishes. Keep it brief and authentic.

Team leader role: Model by occasionally sharing your own sense of purpose connection. Protect this time even when the agenda is full—if you regularly skip it, the message is that purpose is not actually a priority. Vary the format to maintain freshness.

Scaffold 3: Values emergence through decision-making

Purpose: Rather than articulating values in advance, discover them through examining actual decisions and patterns—including how the team's decisions affect those beyond its boundaries.

Suggested starting point: Try monthly or bimonthly reviews (20–30 minutes) of recent significant decisions. Ask:

- What did we actually prioritize in this decision? What did we sacrifice or compromise?
- How does this decision connect to larger purposes beyond our immediate team? (organisational mission, societal challenges, environmental considerations)
- Who was affected by this decision—including people and groups we may not have thought about? How were they affected?
- If someone observed us without hearing what we say, what would they conclude we value based on this decision? Is that what we want to value, or is there a gap?

Keep a running log (visible document or board) of observed values-in-action. Clusters will emerge over 3–6 months. These are your actual operating values, which may differ from espoused values (the values the organisation says it is committed to).

When gaps appear between espoused and actual values, the team can then decide: Accept the actual values (our stated values were aspirational, but these are what we really value). Work to

close the gap (we genuinely want to live the stated values and need to change behavior). Acknowledge trade-offs (we value both X and Y, and sometimes they conflict).

Team leader role: Facilitate the review non-defensively, including examining your own decisions. Don't force convergence to pre-determined values. Let the pattern emerge from actual behavior.

Why this differs from value-statement creation: Values statements often reflect what we wish we valued. This approach discovers what we actually value through revealed preference, which is more honest and often more useful.

Connection to other IDGs: These scaffolds also support Integrity and Authenticity (discovering actual values), Self-Awareness (observing patterns), Critical Thinking (examining decisions honestly), and Connectedness (maintaining awareness of relationships to larger systems).

4.2 Integrity and authenticity — Alignment between espoused and enacted values

What it means as a collective capability

At the individual level, integrity and authenticity mean acting in accordance with one's values with sincerity and honesty. At the team level, this becomes collective integrity—the alignment between what the team says it values and how it actually behaves, decides, and allocates resources. A team with collective integrity walks its talk. When there are gaps between stated values and actual practice, the team notices and addresses them rather than living with unacknowledged contradictions.

Collective integrity extends beyond internal consistency to include alignment between what the organisation claims about its responsibilities—to customers, to employees, to communities, to the environment—and how the team actually operates. A team may espouse commitment to sustainability, to treating suppliers fairly, or to considering community impact, but integrity requires that these commitments show up in actual behavior.

Why it matters at team level

Gaps between espoused and enacted values erode trust and create cynicism. If the team claims to value innovation but punishes risk-taking, or claims to value work-life balance but rewards those who work excessive hours, team members learn that stated values are not to be taken seriously. This undermines commitment and creates a culture where saying one thing and doing another becomes normal. Teams with strong collective integrity, by contrast, build deep trust because members can rely on the team to act consistently with its stated commitments.

This applies equally to the team's external commitments. If the organisation claims to be environmentally responsible but the team routinely ignores environmental considerations in its decisions, or if the organisation emphasizes stakeholder wellbeing but the team never considers how its work affects those stakeholders, integrity is compromised. Team members notice these contradictions, and over time, cynicism about all stated values grows.

Scaffolds

Scaffold 1: Periodic values-behavior alignment review

Purpose: To create regular opportunities for the team to examine whether its actual behavior aligns with its stated values—both internal values about how the team works and external commitments about the team's responsibilities to others.

Format: Every four to six months, dedicate 60–90 minutes to a structured review of values-behavior alignment. Begin by reviewing the team's stated values (from the organisation's values statement or other source), including any stated commitments regarding environmental sustainability, social responsibility, or stakeholder treatment. For each value or commitment, the team discusses two questions: (1) Where have we lived this value well recently? What are examples of this value in action? (2) Where have we fallen short of this value? Where has our behavior contradicted what we say we value?

Include specific attention to external commitments: How well does our behavior align with our stated commitments regarding environmental and social responsibility? Have our decisions considered the wellbeing of stakeholders beyond our immediate customers or organisation? Are there ways our work might be causing harm that we have not acknowledged?

This review requires psychological safety to be productive. If people fear negative consequences for naming gaps, they will not speak honestly. The team leader sets the tone by acknowledging gaps first and treating them as opportunities for improvement rather than occasions for blame. Conclude by identifying one or two specific actions to close the most significant gaps.

Team leader role: Model vulnerability by being the first to name a gap, especially one where your own behavior has fallen short. Receive feedback non-defensively. Ensure the discussion leads to concrete follow-up, not just talk. In subsequent months, check in on whether the actions identified are being implemented.

Scaffold 2: Values check in decision-making

Purpose: To integrate values explicitly into the team's decision-making process, rather than treating values as separate from operational decisions.

Format: When facing significant decisions, include a brief values check as part of the decision process. Before finalising a decision, ask: "How does this decision align with our stated values? Does it align with our commitments regarding environmental sustainability, social responsibility, or stakeholder wellbeing? Are there any values this decision might compromise, and if so, are we comfortable with that trade-off? Does this decision respect the dignity and wellbeing of those affected outside our team and organisation?"

This need not be lengthy—often a few minutes of explicit consideration is sufficient. The key is making it a regular practice rather than an exception.

Not every decision warrants this check—reserve it for decisions with significant implications for team members, stakeholders, environmental impact, or the team's direction. Over time, this practice trains the habit of considering values in decisions, even when the explicit check is not performed.

Team leader role: Prompt the values check when relevant decisions arise. Be willing to reconsider or modify decisions when genuine values conflicts are identified. Acknowledge openly when decisions require difficult trade-offs between competing values.

Scaffold 3: Creating norms that welcome vulnerability

Purpose: To reduce pressure toward conformity and impression management, creating space for authenticity.

Format: This scaffold is less about a specific practice than about deliberately cultivating norms that make it safe to be authentic. Key elements include: The team leader regularly models vulnerability by admitting uncertainty, acknowledging mistakes, and asking for help. When team members take risks by being vulnerable (admitting they do not know something, acknowledging a failure, expressing disagreement), they receive appreciation rather than criticism. The team explicitly discusses and agrees on norms around authenticity—for instance, "We value honest assessment over optimistic spin" or "It is safe to say 'I don't know' here."

Building these norms takes time and requires consistent behavior, especially from the team leader. A single instance of punishing vulnerability can undo months of progress. The goal is a culture where people can bring their genuine selves to work rather than managing impressions.

Team leader role: Your behavior is the primary determinant of whether vulnerability is safe. Go first in being vulnerable. Thank people explicitly when they take the risk of authenticity. Never use vulnerably shared information against someone later. Address privately if someone's vulnerability is met negatively by others.

Connection to other IDGs: These scaffolds also support psychological safety (Empathy and Compassion), Openness and Learning Mindset, Communication Skills, and Connectedness (through honest engagement with external commitments).

4.3 Openness and learning mindset — Team learning practices

What it means as a collective capability

At the individual level, openness and learning mindset refer to a curious, adaptive attitude expressed through willingness to exchange perspectives, be vulnerable, welcome change, and grow. At the team level, this becomes a collective learning capability—the team's ability to learn from experience, adapt based on what it learns, and continuously improve how it works. A team with this capability treats successes and failures alike as sources of learning, questions established practices when they are not working, and remains curious about alternative approaches.

Collective openness also includes receptivity to perspectives from outside the team—from stakeholders, from affected communities, from critics, and from disciplines and worldviews different from the team's own. A truly learning-oriented team does not assume it has all the answers; it actively seeks input from those who see the world differently and who may notice things the team has missed.

Why it matters at team level

Teams that cannot learn collectively repeat the same mistakes, miss opportunities for improvement, and gradually become less effective as their environment changes. Defensive teams that protect existing practices rather than examining them become rigid and brittle. By contrast, teams with strong learning capability adapt to changing circumstances, steadily improve their effectiveness over time, and remain resilient when faced with challenges because they can learn their way through difficulties.

This is particularly important when teams work on challenges connected to sustainability, social equity, or other complex issues. Such challenges require continuous learning because the problems are evolving, because different stakeholders see them differently, and because the team's own assumptions may be incomplete or wrong. Teams that remain open to external perspectives—including uncomfortable feedback from those affected by their work—are better positioned to contribute meaningfully to these larger challenges.

Scaffolds

Scaffold 1: After-action reviews

Purpose: To extract learning from completed projects or significant events while the experience is still fresh.

Format: Following the completion of a project, initiative, or significant event, gather the involved team members for a structured review (30–60 minutes depending on scope). The review addresses four questions: (1) What did we intend to accomplish? (2) What actually happened? (3) Why did it happen that way—what factors contributed to the outcome? (4) What will we do differently next time, and what will we continue doing?

The review should be conducted soon after the event (within one to two weeks) while memories are fresh. It should focus on learning, not blame. The question "Why did it happen that way?" invites systemic analysis of contributing factors, not identification of individuals to fault. Document key learnings and share them with others who might benefit.

Team leader role: Ensure after-action reviews happen—they are easy to skip when the team is eager to move on to the next project. Facilitate the discussion to maintain a learning orientation rather than devolving into blame or defensiveness. If you were involved in the project, model honest self-assessment of your own contribution to what worked and what did not.

Scaffold 2: Regular team retrospectives

Purpose: To create ongoing opportunities for the team to reflect on how it is working and identify improvements, independent of specific projects.

Format: Hold a retrospective every two to four weeks (monthly is often a sustainable rhythm). Dedicate 45–60 minutes. A simple format asks team members to respond to three prompts: (1) What has been going well that we should continue? (2) What has not been going well that we should change? (3) What ideas do we have for improvement?

Begin with a few minutes for individual reflection (people can write their responses on sticky notes or in a shared document). Then share and discuss, clustering related items. Prioritize: you cannot address everything, so identify one or two improvements to focus on before the next retrospective. In the following retrospective, begin by checking in on whether the previous improvements were implemented and what effect they had.

Team leader role: Protect the time for retrospectives—do not let them be crowded out by other demands. Facilitate to ensure broad participation, not just the most vocal members. Follow through on identified improvements—nothing kills retrospective engagement faster than repeatedly identifying issues that are never addressed.

Adaptation: For larger departments, retrospectives can be conducted at the sub-team level with periodic synthesis across sub-teams.

Scaffold 3: Peer learning forums

Purpose: To enable team members to learn from each other's experiences and expertise.

Format: Monthly or bimonthly, dedicate 30–45 minutes to a peer learning session. In each session, one or two team members share something they have learned recently—a technique, a lesson from a project, a useful resource, or an insight from their work. The sharing is followed by discussion: questions, connections to others' work, and exploration of how the learning might be applied more broadly.

Rotate who shares so that over time everyone contributes. The sharing need not be polished—informal, authentic accounts of learning are often more valuable than formal presentations. The emphasis is on practical learning that others can use, not on showcasing accomplishments.

Team leader role: Organise the rotation of sharers. Participate as a sharer yourself, modeling that learning is ongoing for everyone including leaders. Create a safe environment where people can share lessons from failures as well as successes.

Scaffold 4: Storytelling about lessons learned

Purpose: To build a team culture that values learning by making stories of learning a regular part of team discourse.

Format: Integrate brief storytelling moments into regular team meetings or gatherings. This can be as simple as a standing agenda item where one person shares a "learning moment" from recent work—something that surprised them, a mistake they learned from, or an insight that changed how they think about something. Keep it brief (3–5 minutes) and rotate who shares.

Over time, these stories accumulate into a shared narrative about the team as a learning community. They normalise learning from mistakes, make visible that everyone is continuously learning, and create a repository of practical wisdom.

Team leader role: Model by sharing your own learning stories, including stories of mistakes and what you learned from them. Appreciate contributions genuinely. Reference past stories when relevant: "This reminds me of what Maria shared last month about..."

Scaffold 5: Learning from external perspectives and critical voices

Purpose: To ensure the team remains open to learning from those outside its boundaries, including stakeholders, affected communities, and perspectives that may challenge the team's assumptions.

Format: Periodically (quarterly or as significant situations arise), deliberately seek input from external perspectives. This might include:

- Inviting a stakeholder, customer, or community member to share their experience of the team's work or the organisation's activities
- Reviewing feedback, complaints, or criticism from external sources and discussing what can be learned from it
- Seeking out perspectives from communities or groups affected by the organisation's activities, including those who may not typically be heard
- Engaging with viewpoints that challenge the team's assumptions—from other disciplines, other sectors, or people with different values

The session (45–60 minutes) should focus on genuine listening and learning, not defending. If the feedback is critical, resist the urge to explain or justify. Ask questions to understand more deeply. Afterward, identify what the team has learned and what, if anything, should change as a result.

Team leader role: Create psychological safety for engaging with uncomfortable feedback. Model non-defensive response to criticism—thank external voices for their input even when it is difficult to hear. Ensure that external input is genuinely considered, not just collected. Protect the team from piling on internal criticism while also ensuring genuine engagement with external perspectives.

Why this matters: Teams can easily become insular, recycling the same assumptions and perspectives. When working on challenges that affect others—as all teams ultimately do—the team's understanding is necessarily incomplete without input from those affected. This scaffold counteracts the natural tendency toward internal focus.

Connection to other IDGs: These scaffolds also support Self-Awareness (through structured reflection), Critical Thinking (through examination of what worked and what did not), Perspective Skills (through exposure to how others approach similar challenges), Humility (through willingness to learn from external critique), and Connectedness (through engagement with those affected by the team's work).

4.4 Self-awareness — Collective reflection on team patterns

What it means as a collective capability

At the individual level, self-awareness means being in reflective contact with one's own thoughts, emotions, desires, and actions, maintaining a realistic self-image, and regulating oneself. At the team level, self-awareness becomes the collective ability to observe and reflect on the team's own patterns—how it makes decisions, how it handles conflict, how it responds to pressure, what dynamics recur in its interactions. A self-aware team can step back from its habitual ways of operating and ask: "Is this pattern serving us well? What might we be missing?"

Collective self-awareness also includes awareness of how the team's patterns affect its relationships beyond its boundaries—with other teams, with stakeholders, with those affected by the team's work. A team might be highly effective internally yet have patterns that create friction externally or that lead to blind spots about the team's impact.

Why it matters at team level

Teams, like individuals, develop habitual patterns that operate largely outside conscious awareness. Some of these patterns are helpful; others are not. A team that cannot observe its own patterns is at the mercy of them—it keeps repeating behaviors that do not serve it well, often without recognizing the repetition. Collective self-awareness creates the possibility of choice: once a pattern is seen, the team can decide whether to continue it or try something different.

This awareness becomes particularly important when teams are working on complex challenges where their own assumptions and biases may lead them astray. Teams that can observe their own patterns—including patterns of what they pay attention to and what they ignore—are better equipped to notice when their habitual approaches are not adequate to the challenges they face.

Scaffolds

Scaffold 1: Periodic team health assessment

Purpose: To create a structured opportunity for the team to assess its own functioning across multiple dimensions.

Format: Two to four times per year, conduct a team health assessment. This can use a simple set of questions that team members respond to individually, followed by collective discussion of the results. Questions might address dimensions such as: clarity of purpose and goals, quality of communication, effectiveness of decision-making, how well we handle disagreement, trust and psychological safety, workload and sustainability, support for learning and development, and quality of relationships with external stakeholders.

Team members can rate each dimension (for instance, using a simple scale of 1–5 or red/yellow/green) and add brief comments. The team leader compiles results (anonymously if preferred) and facilitates a discussion focused on: Where are we strong? Where are we struggling? What one or two areas should we prioritize for improvement?

Team leader role: Design or adapt the assessment questions for your team's context. Compile results in a way that makes patterns visible. Facilitate discussion non-defensively, especially if results indicate concerns about leadership or management. Treat the assessment as information for improvement, not as a performance evaluation.

Scaffold 2: "How we work together" dialogues

Purpose: To create space for explicit discussion of team dynamics and patterns that are often left unspoken.

Format: Periodically (perhaps quarterly), dedicate 60–90 minutes to a dialogue focused specifically on how the team works together, rather than on task work. Topics might include: How do we typically make decisions? Is that working well? How do we handle disagreement when it arises? How do we respond when under pressure? What patterns have you noticed in how we interact? Are there topics we tend to avoid or perspectives we tend to dismiss?

This dialogue requires psychological safety—people must feel they can name dynamics without fear of negative consequences. The team leader can open by naming a pattern they have noticed, including their own contribution to it. The goal is awareness and exploration, not immediate problem-solving; sometimes simply naming a pattern creates space for it to shift.

Team leader role: Go first in naming patterns, including patterns involving your own behavior. Create and maintain safety for honest discussion. Be genuinely curious rather than defensive. Follow up in subsequent weeks by noticing and naming when patterns appear: "I notice we're doing that thing we talked about..."

Scaffold 3: Process-focused debriefs

Purpose: To build the habit of reflecting not just on task outcomes but on the behavioral and relational processes that produced them.

Format: After significant meetings, decisions, or interactions, take 5–10 minutes to debrief not just what was decided but how the process went. Questions might include: How was our process in that meeting? Did everyone who needed to contribute get to do so? Were there dynamics that helped or hindered us? What might we do differently next time?

This need not happen after every interaction—that would be exhausting. Reserve it for significant or challenging situations, or schedule it periodically (for instance, briefly at the end of every second weekly meeting). The aim is to build awareness of process, not to over-analyze every interaction.

Team leader role: Prompt the debrief and participate genuinely. Model honest assessment of your own contribution to dynamics. Use what you learn to make adjustments in how you facilitate future interactions.

Scaffold 4: Time-out signal for process awareness

Purpose: To enable any team member to pause interaction when they notice that communication patterns have become tense, unfocused, or unconstructive, creating space for the team to become aware of its current process.

Format: Establish an agreed signal (such as forming a "T" with the hands) that any team member can use to request a brief pause. When the signal is given, the team stops the current discussion and takes 30–60 seconds to notice what is happening. Questions for the pause:

- What's happening in our discussion right now?
- Are we being productive, or have we gotten stuck?
- What do we need to shift?

After the brief check-in, the team decides how to proceed—perhaps returning to the discussion with adjusted approach, perhaps taking a longer break, perhaps acknowledging that the topic needs a different setting.

Team leader role: Introduce and legitimize the practice. Be the first to use it, including when you notice your own contribution to problematic patterns. Respond appreciatively when others use it—never dismiss or override a time-out request. If the signal is never used, check whether people feel genuinely free to use it.

Why this matters: Teams often continue unproductive patterns because no one feels empowered to interrupt. The time-out signal distributes the responsibility for process awareness and creates explicit permission to pause. It works best when it becomes genuinely available to everyone, not just the team leader.

Scaffold 5: Noticing and naming team patterns in real-time

Purpose: To develop the team's collective capacity to notice what is happening in the moment and name it, bringing implicit dynamics into shared awareness.

Format: This is less a specific practice than a norm to cultivate: the habit of pausing to name what is happening. "I notice the energy in the room dropped when we started discussing that topic." "It seems like we're circling around something we're not saying directly." "I'm aware that we've been talking for twenty minutes without hearing from several people." "I notice we're only considering one stakeholder's perspective."

The team leader can model this by regularly offering observations about what they notice. Over time, other team members can be invited and encouraged to do the same. The observations are offered tentatively and curiously, not as accusations or judgments. The response is exploration ("Yes, what's going on there?") rather than defensiveness.

Team leader role: Model the practice consistently. Receive observations from others non-defensively. Appreciate when team members notice and name something, even if it is uncomfortable. Over time, explicitly invite others to contribute observations: "What are you noticing right now?"

Connection to other IDGs: These scaffolds also support Openness and Learning Mindset (by creating reflection practices), Integrity and Authenticity (by surfacing gaps between intentions and behavior), Communication Skills (by examining how the team communicates), and Presence (through heightened attention to what is happening in the moment).

4.5 Presence — Creating space for attention and responsiveness

What it means as a collective capability

At the individual level, presence is the capacity to be fully present in the here and now, to accept reality as it unfolds, and to respond in meaningful ways. At the team level, presence becomes the collective capacity to attend to what is actually happening—in the room, in the work, in the environment—rather than operating on autopilot or being preoccupied with past grievances or future anxieties. A present team can slow down when needed, notice what is emerging, and respond to current reality rather than reacting from habit.

Presence at team level also means being genuinely present to the complexity of the challenges the team is addressing, including their human and environmental dimensions. Many of the consequences of the team's work—effects on distant stakeholders, long-term environmental impacts, contributions to systemic problems or solutions—are not visible in the team's immediate experience. Collective presence includes the capacity to hold awareness of these less visible dimensions.

Why it matters at team level

Teams often operate on autopilot—following familiar scripts, executing established routines, rushing from one agenda item to the next without genuine attention. This efficiency has a cost: important signals get missed, creative possibilities go unnoticed, and relational dynamics deteriorate without anyone attending to them. Teams that cultivate presence can sense when something important is happening that warrants attention, notice when the current approach is not working, and create space for genuine dialogue rather than surface-level exchange.

Presence is particularly important when teams are addressing challenges connected to sustainability and social responsibility. The consequences of decisions may be distant in time or space but nonetheless real. Teams that can hold awareness of what is not immediately visible—the downstream effects, the affected communities, the long-term implications—are better equipped to make decisions that serve more than immediate convenience.

Scaffolds

Scaffold 1: Meeting check-ins

Purpose: To help team members arrive mentally and emotionally at the meeting, creating a shared starting point of presence before diving into task work.

Format: Begin meetings with a brief check-in round (5–10 minutes depending on team size). Each person shares briefly in response to a simple prompt. The prompt can vary: "How are you arriving today?" "What's one word that describes your state right now?" "What's on your mind as we start?" "What do you need to set aside to be fully present?"

The check-in is not a discussion—each person shares briefly, others listen without responding, and the round continues. The purpose is not to solve problems raised in check-ins but simply to acknowledge where people are, making it easier for everyone to be present. Keep it brief: if check-ins routinely take too long, they will be cut.

Team leader role: Introduce and model the practice. Share genuinely yourself—if you check in with superficial positivity every time, others will follow suit. Protect the check-in time; don't skip it when the agenda is full. Respect what is shared by not using it inappropriately later.

Adaptation: For larger groups, check-ins can be done in pairs or small groups that then join the larger meeting, or a brief whole-group prompt can be answered via a shared document or chat.

Scaffold 2: Intentional pauses

Purpose: To slow down habitual autopilot responses and create space for more considered, present engagement.

Format: Introduce intentional pauses at key moments in team interactions. Before an important discussion, take 30 seconds of silence for people to gather their thoughts. After a significant point is made, pause before responding to let it sink in. When a decision is about to be made, pause to ask: "Are we ready to decide, or is there more we need to consider?" When tension arises, pause and name it: "Let's take a breath. Something important is happening here."

These pauses feel awkward at first, especially in cultures that value rapid response. With practice, they become natural and valued. The key is using them deliberately at moments when slowing down would improve the quality of attention and response.

Team leader role: Model pausing yourself rather than always having an immediate response. Introduce pauses explicitly at first: "Let's take a moment of silence before we respond to that." Over time, pausing can become a shared practice that any team member can invoke.

Scaffold 3: Protected time for genuine dialogue

Purpose: To create recurring opportunities for deeper, more present conversation that goes beyond task-focused information exchange.

Format: Periodically (monthly or quarterly), create protected time for dialogue that is not structured around an agenda or task. This might be a 60–90 minute session where the team explores a question together: "What is the most important thing we're not talking about?" "What are we learning about our work that surprises us?" "What do we need from each other that we're not getting?"

The dialogue can also engage with the team's broader context and impact: "How is our work affecting those we don't see directly?" "What are the long-term consequences of our current approach?" "What would the communities or ecosystems affected by our work say if they were here?"

The dialogue is not aimed at solving problems or making decisions—it is aimed at deepening understanding and connection. Allow the conversation to unfold rather than controlling it tightly. Tolerate silences and uncertainty. The value is in the quality of presence and attention, not in reaching conclusions.

Team leader role: Protect this time from being taken over by urgent operational matters. Facilitate lightly, offering prompts but not directing. Participate as a member of the dialogue,

not just as facilitator. Model presence by being fully attentive rather than checking devices or thinking about the next meeting.

Scaffold 4: Creating unconditional space for emergence

Purpose: To create periodic opportunities for team members to explore questions, concerns, or possibilities without the pressure to reach conclusions, defend positions, or achieve specific outcomes. This practice supports the team's capacity to engage with complex challenges where premature closure limits understanding.

Format: Periodically (monthly or quarterly), create protected time (45–90 minutes) for a different quality of conversation. Key elements:

- No agenda or predetermined outcome
- No requirement to solve anything or reach conclusions
- Explicit permission to not know, to be uncertain, to change one's mind
- Space for silence and reflection
- No evaluation or judgment of contributions
- Welcome for difficult questions and uncomfortable observations

Possible opening questions (offered lightly, not required): "What are we not seeing that we need to see?" "What would we notice if we slowed down?" "What matters here that we haven't named?" "What might we be afraid to look at?"

This is different from dialogue with a topic—it is space where what needs to emerge can emerge, without being shaped by the need to be productive. Some sessions may feel directionless; others may surface important insights. Trust the process.

Team leader role: Create and protect this time. Participate as an equal, not as leader. Resist the pull to structure or direct. Tolerate silence and uncertainty. Trust that valuable insight may emerge without being forced. Do not judge sessions as "productive" or "unproductive"—the space itself is valuable.

Why this matters: Many important questions—especially those related to complex challenges like sustainability, ethics, and long-term impact—cannot be addressed through goal-directed problem-solving alone. Teams need space where understanding can emerge without defensiveness, where difficult truths can be voiced, and where the complexity of challenges can be genuinely felt. This scaffold creates that space.

Connection to other IDGs: These scaffolds also support Self-Awareness (by cultivating attention to what is happening), Communication Skills (by creating space for deeper listening), Empathy and Compassion (by enabling attunement to others' states), Openness and Learning Mindset (by welcoming what emerges), and Inner Compass (by connecting to what genuinely matters).

Summary: The Being dimension

The scaffolds in this section address the foundational capabilities that enable a team to work with purpose, integrity, and awareness. They create space for reflection—on purpose, on values, on learning, on patterns, on what is happening in the moment. This reflective capacity is not a luxury; it is what allows teams to improve, adapt, and sustain their effectiveness over time. Without it, teams repeat the same patterns whether those patterns serve them or not.

These practices also help teams maintain connection to purposes and responsibilities beyond their immediate organisational context. The quarterly purpose reflection that asks about contribution to larger challenges, the values review that includes external commitments, the practice of learning from external perspectives, the dialogue that considers effects on those not in the room—these elements help ensure that the team's inner development serves not only team effectiveness but meaningful contribution to the world.

Start with the scaffolds that address your team's most pressing needs or build on existing strengths. A team with no shared sense of purpose might begin with the purpose reflection dialogue and values emergence practices. A team that repeats the same mistakes might prioritize after-action reviews and retrospectives. A team that operates entirely on autopilot might benefit most from check-ins and intentional pauses. A team that has become insular might start with learning from external perspectives. Whatever your starting point, the aim is to develop your team's capacity to work not just harder, but with greater awareness of what it is doing, why, and what effects it is having.

When scaffolds for the Being dimension aren't taking hold

If you've tried scaffolds for Being capabilities and they're not working, consider:

Check the foundation: Being scaffolds often require psychological safety. If people fear that honest reflection or admitting uncertainty will be used against them, reflection practices will remain superficial.

Check for disconnection from real work: If Being scaffolds feel like abstract exercises disconnected from what the team actually does, engagement will suffer. Try connecting reflection practices more explicitly to concrete challenges the team faces, including its external responsibilities and impact.

Check for hidden constraints: What makes it difficult for presence and reflection to develop? Is the pace of work so relentless that slowing down feels impossible? Do organisational systems reward speed over thoughtfulness? Are there time pressures that make reflection feel like a luxury? Is there a culture of heroic overwork that makes sustainable pacing difficult to model?

Try a different entry point: The suggested scaffolds aren't the only way to develop Being capabilities. If structured reflection isn't working, awareness might develop through: individual journaling or reflection that people share voluntarily, informal conversations about purpose and meaning, connection to the team's contribution to larger goals (SDGs, societal challenges), stories about what makes work meaningful, or simple moments of silence or pause rather than elaborate practices.

Accept current limits: Sometimes a team isn't ready for deep reflection practices, and forcing them creates resistance. It may be more productive to: start with simpler awareness practices (brief check-ins rather than extended dialogues), wait for a period of less intense pressure, build psychological safety first through other means, or accept that this team may develop reflective capacity more slowly or differently.

5. Thinking — Understanding complexity together

The Thinking dimension addresses how a team makes sense of the world: how it analyzes problems, considers different perspectives, understands systems and interconnections, thinks about the future, and generates new ideas. At the individual level, Thinking encompasses critical thinking, perspective skills, systems thinking, long-term orientation and visioning, and creativity. At the team level, these become collective capabilities for rigorous analysis, integrating diverse viewpoints, understanding complexity, maintaining strategic direction, and generating innovation.

Teams that develop collective capability in the Thinking dimension can examine ideas and plans critically rather than accepting them unchallenged. They draw on diverse perspectives to understand issues more fully. They see patterns and connections that would be invisible to any individual member. They maintain awareness of longer time horizons even while handling immediate demands. They can think creatively about challenges rather than defaulting to conventional approaches.

These capabilities matter because the challenges teams face are typically more complex than any individual can fully grasp. A team that thinks well together can understand situations more accurately, make better decisions, and find solutions that would not occur to individuals working alone. The scaffolds in this section help teams develop structures and practices that enable collective intelligence to emerge.

The complex challenges outlined in the SDGs—from climate change to poverty to inequality—cannot be understood or addressed through simplistic analysis. They require exactly the kind of collective thinking capabilities described in this dimension: rigorous examination of ideas, integration of diverse perspectives, understanding of complex systems, strategic long-term thinking, and creative generation of new possibilities.

5.1 Critical thinking — Rigorous examination of ideas and plans

What it means as a collective capability

At the individual level, critical thinking is the ability to reflect on the validity of ideas, evidence, assumptions, and plans. At the team level, this becomes a collective capacity for rigorous examination—the team’s ability to question assumptions, probe the reasoning behind proposals, identify weaknesses in plans, and challenge ideas constructively before committing to them. A team with strong collective critical thinking does not accept ideas simply because they are confidently presented or come from authority; it subjects all significant proposals to genuine scrutiny.

Why it matters at team level

Teams often fail to think critically together even when individual members are capable of critical analysis. Social dynamics suppress questioning: people defer to authority, avoid challenging colleagues, or fear appearing negative. The result is that flawed plans go unexamined, weak assumptions remain untested, and preventable problems occur. Teams that cultivate collective critical thinking catch problems earlier, make more robust decisions, and avoid costly mistakes that would have been obvious if anyone had asked the hard questions.

Scaffolds

Scaffold 1: Designated challenger role

Purpose: To ensure that important proposals receive genuine critical examination by assigning someone the explicit responsibility to challenge them.

Format: When discussing significant decisions or plans, assign one team member the role of designated challenger (sometimes called devil’s advocate). This person’s job is to identify weaknesses, question assumptions, and articulate what could go wrong. The role is assigned explicitly and rotated across team members over time so that no one is permanently cast as the critic.

The designated challenger should prepare by reviewing the proposal beforehand and identifying points to probe. During discussion, they raise questions and concerns: “What assumptions are we making here? What evidence supports this? What could cause this to fail? What are we not considering?” The rest of the team engages with these challenges seriously rather than dismissing them.

The value of this role is that it makes critical questioning legitimate and expected. When challenge is someone’s assigned job, they can raise difficult questions without it being attributed to personal negativity or disloyalty.

Team leader role: Assign the role and ensure it rotates. Model receiving challenges non-defensively, especially when your own proposals are being examined. Thank the challenger for their contribution. If the role becomes perfunctory, reinvigorate it by discussing its importance.

Scaffold 2: Pre-mortem analysis

Purpose: To surface potential problems with a plan by imagining it has already failed and working backward to identify what went wrong.

Format: Before finalising a significant plan or decision, conduct a pre-mortem exercise (20–45 minutes depending on complexity). The facilitator sets the scene: “Imagine we are six months (or a year) in the future. This initiative has failed badly. What happened? What went wrong?”

Team members individually write down all the reasons they can think of for why the initiative might have failed (5–10 minutes). Then share and compile the list. Discuss: Which of these failure modes are most likely? Which would be most damaging? What can we do now to prevent or mitigate them?

The pre-mortem works because it gives people permission to voice concerns. Saying “this might fail because...” can feel disloyal or negative; saying “in our imagined failure, one cause was...” is psychologically easier. The exercise often surfaces concerns that team members were thinking but not saying.

Team leader role: Facilitate the exercise and participate genuinely—contribute your own failure scenarios. Ensure all concerns raised are taken seriously. Follow through by actually modifying plans based on what the pre-mortem reveals.

Scaffold 3: Progressive assumption testing (alternative to pre-mortem)

Purpose: To test critical assumptions before committing fully to a plan, rather than imagining all possible failures at once.

Suggested starting point: When facing a significant decision or plan, try this process:

1. Identify the 2–3 most critical assumptions (15 minutes). What has to be true for this to work? What are we assuming about resources, timing, people’s responses, or external conditions?
2. Rank by uncertainty and importance (5 minutes). Which assumptions are we most uncertain about? Which assumptions, if wrong, would be most damaging? Focus on high-uncertainty, high-importance assumptions.
3. Design cheap tests (20 minutes). For each critical assumption: what’s the smallest, cheapest way to test if it’s valid? “Cheap” means low time, low cost, low political risk. Examples: informal conversation with 2–3 stakeholders, quick prototype, small pilot with willing participants.
4. Act on what you learn (ongoing). If assumption validated: proceed with more confidence. If assumption invalidated: adjust plan before investing heavily. If assumption untestable: acknowledge as risk and monitor.

Team leader role: Resist pressure to skip testing and “just get started.” The time spent testing critical assumptions almost always saves time by avoiding expensive failures.

When to use this vs. pre-mortem: Pre-mortem is better for complex plans with many potential failure modes. Assumption testing is better when you have a few critical uncertainties that can be tested incrementally. Both can be used in combination.

Connection to other IDGs: These scaffolds support Systems Thinking (understanding assumptions about system behavior), Proactivity (testing assumptions is proactive), and Courage (willingness to test rather than assume).

Scaffold 4: Building norms that welcome constructive challenge

Purpose: To create a team culture where questioning and challenging ideas is expected and valued, not discouraged.

Format: This scaffold involves deliberately cultivating norms rather than implementing a specific practice. Key elements include: Explicitly discuss and agree as a team that constructive challenge is valued. Distinguish between challenging ideas (welcomed) and attacking people (not acceptable). Recognise and thank people who raise good questions or identify problems. Respond to challenges with curiosity rather than defensiveness.

The team leader’s behavior is especially important. If the leader responds defensively when challenged, or if challengers are subsequently marginalized, the norm will not take hold regardless of what is said. Conversely, when the leader consistently welcomes challenge and thanks people for it, the norm spreads.

Team leader role: Model receiving challenges gracefully. Explicitly thank people who raise difficult questions. When someone’s challenge leads to a better outcome, acknowledge it publicly. If you notice people holding back, invite challenge directly: “What are we missing? What concerns haven’t been voiced?”

Connection to other IDGs: These scaffolds support Openness and Learning Mindset (by treating all ideas as open to examination), Perspective Skills (by drawing out diverse views on proposals), and Integrity (by ensuring plans are genuinely vetted rather than rubber-stamped).

5.2 Perspective skills — Working with multiple ways of seeing

What it means as a collective capability

At the individual level, perspective skills involve the ability to learn from diverse perspectives and integrate insights into reflective sense-making and action. At the team level, this becomes something more powerful: the collective capacity to recognise, explore, and integrate different systems of interpretation—not just different opinions, but different configurations of assumptions, values, explanatory models, and preferred actions.

A perspective is more than a viewpoint or opinion. It is a coherent way of making sense of a situation that includes: what problems are seen as most important, what values are at stake, what causes are assumed to produce what effects, what consequences are hoped for or feared, and what possibilities are visible or invisible. When team members hold different perspectives, they are often not simply disagreeing about facts—they are operating from different frameworks for interpreting reality.

Teams with strong collective perspective skills recognise that their own thinking is shaped by a perspective—not the reality, but a way of seeing. They treat differing views not as obstacles to overcome but as sources of insight. They move from reacting to difference ("Why do they think that?") to learning from contrast ("What assumptions lead them to see it that way, and what might we be missing?").

This capability extends beyond the team's internal discussions. Teams that develop perspective skills become better at understanding stakeholders, communities, and others affected by their work—people who may see the world very differently than the team does. This is essential for teams working on challenges connected to sustainability, social responsibility, or other complex issues where multiple legitimate perspectives exist and must be considered.

Why it matters at team level

Teams routinely face challenges that have no single correct answer—situations where the problem itself is defined differently by different people, where goals conflict, and where multiple stakeholders have legitimate but incompatible concerns. Sustainability initiatives, organisational change, inclusion efforts, resource allocation decisions—these are not puzzles with solutions waiting to be found, but dilemmas requiring navigation among competing valid perspectives.

Teams that rely on their habitual, dominant viewpoint risk significant blind spots. They may reach "consensus" that is actually just the loudest or most powerful perspective drowning out others. They may design solutions that work well from their perspective but create problems for stakeholders who see things differently. They may get stuck in unproductive conflict because they cannot understand why others see the situation so differently.

Collective perspective skills enable teams to surface tacit assumptions that shape their decision-making, navigate tensions between legitimate values (such as stability versus change, or local autonomy versus coordination), understand why stakeholders respond as they do, create strategies that integrate rather than override different concerns, and avoid the trap of assuming their perspective is simply "correct" while others are mistaken.

Scaffolds

Scaffold 1: Perspective mapping dialogues

Purpose: To surface and explore the structure of different perspectives on a shared issue, making visible the different logics that lead people to different conclusions.

Format: When facing a significant decision or challenge where different views exist, use a structured mapping process (60–90 minutes). The map explores five dimensions of each perspective:

1. What problem is most important? Different perspectives often define the core problem differently. What does each perspective see as the central issue that needs to be addressed?
2. What values are at stake? What does each perspective care most about protecting or advancing? What would be lost if this perspective were ignored?
3. What causes what? What theory of how things work underlies each perspective? What does each perspective assume about what actions will lead to what consequences (= theories of change)?
4. What consequences are feared? What outcomes does each perspective most want to avoid? What risks does it see that others might minimize?
5. What is not being considered? What might each perspective be missing, minimizing, or unable to see? What are its potential blind spots?

The process: First, identify the different perspectives relevant to the issue—these might be perspectives held by team members, by different stakeholder groups, or by different parts of the organisation. Then, working individually or in small groups, complete the map for each perspective. Finally, share and compare maps in dialogue, exploring differences and looking for insights that emerge from the contrasts.

The maps can also be used to explore external perspectives—how might affected communities, future generations, or environmental considerations be represented? What would their maps look like?

Team leader role: Facilitate with genuine curiosity. Emphasize that no map is "wrong"—each reveals the internal logic of a way of seeing. Help the team move from judging perspectives to understanding them. Use the comparison to surface insights: "What do we see now that we didn't see before? What assumptions of our own have become visible?"

Why this works: Making perspective structure explicit allows teams to understand disagreements at a deeper level. Often what looks like a factual dispute is actually a difference in what problem is being solved, what values are prioritized, or what causal model is assumed. Once this is visible, more productive dialogue becomes possible.

Scaffold 2: Perspective contrast exercises

Purpose: To sharpen awareness of how different perspectives frame the same issue and to develop the capacity to genuinely understand views that differ from one's own.

Format: When facing a dilemma where different legitimate perspectives exist, assign small groups or individuals to deliberately adopt and articulate different positions (45–60 minutes). For example, if the team is considering a policy change, different groups might prepare the case from: those who would benefit from the change, those who would be disrupted by it, those

responsible for implementation, those concerned about long-term consequences, or those representing environmental or community interests.

Each group prepares not just arguments but the underlying perspective: What problem does this view see? What values drive it? What does it assume about how things work? What does it fear?

Groups then present their perspectives and respond to questions—not to "win" but to help others understand the internal logic of their assigned view. Afterward, the full team reflects together:

- What assumptions did each view rely on?
- What insights emerged from hearing a perspective articulated fully?
- Where did you feel resistance—and what might that reveal about your own assumptions?
- What would need to be true for each perspective to be valid?

Team leader role: Frame the process as learning, not debate. The goal is not to determine which perspective is "right" but to understand each one deeply enough to learn from it. Model genuine curiosity about perspectives different from your own. Ensure that perspectives representing stakeholders or communities outside the team are taken as seriously as internal perspectives.

Scaffold 3: Perspective rotation in problem analysis

Purpose: To systematically examine issues from multiple angles rather than settling on the first plausible interpretation, and to develop awareness of how lens choice shapes what is seen.

Format: When analyzing a complex situation, deliberately rotate through different lenses (45–75 minutes). Choose lenses relevant to your context. Common options include:

- Operational lens: What does this look like in terms of practical implementation, resources, and workflow?
- Human impact lens: How does this affect the people involved—their experience, wellbeing, and relationships?
- Stakeholder lens: How do different groups affected by this (including those outside the organisation) see the situation?
- Ethical lens: What values are at stake? What would be right or fair?
- Systems lens: What patterns, connections, and feedback loops are at play? What are the second-order effects?
- Long-term lens: How does this look over a longer time horizon? What are we trading off between present and future?
- Environmental lens: What are the ecological dimensions? How does this affect resource use, waste, and natural systems?

For each lens, the team discusses: How would this lens interpret the situation? What would it highlight that other lenses miss? What would it minimize or overlook? What actions would it suggest?

After rotating through all lenses, hold a meta-reflection:

- Which lenses felt natural to us, and which felt unfamiliar or uncomfortable?

- What did we not see until we changed lenses?
- What tensions exist between what different lenses reveal?
- How do we move toward an approach that integrates rather than ignores these different views?

Team leader role: Create psychological safety for exploring unfamiliar perspectives. Slow the pace—the tendency is to rush through lenses rather than genuinely inhabiting each one. Ask not just "What does this lens show us?" but "What are we learning about our own habitual way of seeing?"

Scaffold 4: Building perspective awareness into ongoing practice

Purpose: To cultivate perspective awareness as an ongoing team capability rather than a one-time exercise.

Format: Integrate perspective awareness into regular team practices in small but consistent ways:

In decision-making: Before finalising significant decisions, ask: "Whose perspective have we not yet considered? What would this decision look like to those most affected by it? What might we be missing because of how we typically see things?"

When facing disagreement: Instead of immediately debating who is right, pause to map the perspectives: "What is each of us seeing? What assumptions underlie our different views? What might each perspective be capturing that the others miss?"

When engaging stakeholders: Prepare by mapping their likely perspective using the five dimensions. After engagement, reflect: "What did we learn about how they see things? Were we surprised? What assumptions of ours were challenged?"

In retrospectives: Periodically ask: "Are there perspectives we consistently overlook? Are there voices that are rarely heard in our discussions? What would it take to genuinely include them?"

Team leader role: Model perspective awareness in your own reasoning—share when you notice your own assumptions, when you learn from a different view, when you change your mind because of what another perspective revealed. Regularly prompt perspective questions until they become part of the team's natural discourse.

Connection to other IDGs: These scaffolds support Critical Thinking (by examining assumptions and evaluating reasoning from multiple angles), Inclusive Mindset (by recognising the legitimacy and dignity of different ways of seeing), Systems Thinking (by revealing how different perspectives illuminate different aspects of complex situations), Openness and Learning Mindset (by treating different views as sources of learning), Humility (by recognising the partiality of one's own perspective), and Connectedness (by building understanding of how stakeholders and communities see the world).

When perspective skills scaffolds aren't taking hold

If you've tried scaffolds for perspective skills and they're not working, consider:

Check the foundation: Perspective work requires psychological safety. If people fear that expressing a minority view or articulating an unpopular perspective (even in a role-play) will be held against them, genuine perspective exploration won't happen. The exercises will become performative.

Check for hidden constraints: What makes it difficult for perspective skills to develop? Is there pressure to reach consensus quickly that cuts off exploration of different views? Are certain perspectives (senior leader's view, dominant professional culture) treated as obviously correct while others are marginalized? Is the team so homogeneous that genuinely different perspectives aren't present?

Try a different entry point: The suggested scaffolds aren't the only way to develop perspective skills. If structured exercises aren't working, capability might develop through: bringing in external voices who hold different perspectives, post-mortems that examine how limited perspective contributed to problems, exposure to how other teams or organisations approach similar challenges, or individual reflection on encounters with different perspectives that people then share.

Watch for pseudo-perspective-taking: Sometimes teams go through the motions of considering different perspectives without genuinely engaging. Signs include: other perspectives being presented as obviously flawed, quick dismissal after brief consideration, treating the exercise as a hurdle before reaching the "real" (predetermined) conclusion. If this is happening, slow down and address it directly. Genuine perspective skills require actually being open to learning from different views, not just listing them.

Consider the issue selection: Perspective exercises work best on issues where different views genuinely exist and have legitimate basis. If the team practices only on issues where there's already consensus or where one answer is obviously correct, they won't develop real perspective skills. Choose issues that actually involve tension between legitimate perspectives.

5.3 Systems thinking — Understanding interconnections and patterns

What it means as a collective capability

At the individual level, systems thinking is the ability to understand complexity and work with the interconnections and properties of systems. At the team level, this becomes collective systems awareness—the team's ability to see patterns, understand how different factors connect and influence each other, anticipate unintended consequences, and avoid simplistic cause-and-effect thinking. A team with strong collective systems thinking recognises that most significant challenges involve multiple interacting factors, feedback loops, and delayed effects that cannot be understood through linear analysis alone.

Systems thinking at team level operates at multiple scales. Teams need to understand the systems within which their immediate work takes place—organisational dynamics, stakeholder relationships, workflow interdependencies. But they also benefit from understanding how their work connects to larger systems: supply chains, community impacts, environmental effects, and the broader social and ecological context in which their organisation operates. The challenges described in the Sustainable Development Goals—climate change, inequality, health, education—are all fundamentally systemic. Teams that can think systemically are better equipped to understand how their work connects to these larger patterns and to contribute constructively rather than inadvertently making things worse.

Why it matters at team level

Many team decisions fail because they address symptoms rather than root causes, or because they trigger unintended consequences that were foreseeable but not foreseen. Teams often fall into linear thinking: identify a problem, implement a fix, move on. When the "fix" creates new problems or the original problem returns, they are surprised. Teams with collective systems

thinking approach challenges more effectively because they look for underlying patterns, consider how interventions might ripple through interconnected systems, and design solutions that account for complexity rather than ignoring it.

This matters not only for the team's immediate effectiveness but for its broader impact. A team might optimize its own operations while creating problems elsewhere—for other departments, for suppliers, for communities, or for the environment. A team might solve an immediate problem in ways that contribute to larger systemic issues. Systems thinking helps teams see these connections and make decisions that account for effects beyond their immediate scope. This is particularly important for organisations that have made commitments to sustainability, social responsibility, or contributing to SDG-related goals—such commitments require the capacity to see how organisational activities connect to larger systemic patterns.

Scaffolds

Scaffold 1: Collaborative mapping of interconnections

Purpose: To make visible the connections between factors relevant to a challenge, enabling the team to see patterns that are not obvious when factors are considered separately.

Format: When facing a complex challenge, dedicate time (45–90 minutes) to mapping the system together. Start by identifying the key factors or elements involved—what are the main things that affect this situation? Write each factor on a sticky note or whiteboard space. Then draw connections: Which factors influence which others? Are there feedback loops where A affects B and B affects A? Are there delays where effects take time to appear?

The map does not need to be perfect or complete. Its value lies in making the team's understanding explicit and shared, and in revealing connections that individuals might not have seen. After mapping, discuss: What patterns do we see? Where are the leverage points—places where intervention might have disproportionate effect? What unintended consequences should we watch for?

Team leader role: Facilitate the mapping process, ensuring participation from people with different knowledge of different parts of the system. Keep the focus on understanding connections rather than jumping to solutions. Refer back to the map when planning interventions and monitoring effects.

Scaffold 2: Expanding the system boundary

Purpose: To deliberately extend the team's systems thinking beyond its immediate operational context to include broader connections—to stakeholders, communities, supply chains, and environmental systems.

Format: After the team has developed some comfort with systems mapping for immediate challenges, periodically (perhaps quarterly) apply systems thinking to larger questions (60–90 minutes):

Upstream connections: Where do our inputs come from? What systems produce the resources, materials, information, or labor we depend on? What are the conditions in those systems? Are there environmental or social issues in our supply chain or among our suppliers that we should be aware of?

Downstream effects: Where do our outputs go? Who uses what we produce, and what happens as a result? What happens to waste or byproducts? How does our work affect customers, communities, or ecosystems downstream?

Broader systemic context: How does our work connect to larger social or environmental patterns? Does our work contribute to or help address challenges like climate change, inequality, resource depletion, or community wellbeing? Are there feedback loops between our activities and larger systemic issues?

This exercise is not about making the team responsible for solving global problems—it is about developing awareness of connections that might otherwise remain invisible. This awareness can inform decisions, reveal risks and opportunities, and help the team align its work with organisational commitments to sustainability or social responsibility.

Team leader role: Frame this as expanding awareness, not adding burden. The goal is to see connections, not to fix everything. Help the team identify which connections are most relevant to their work and where awareness might inform better decisions.

Scaffold 3: Second-order effects questioning

Purpose: To build the habit of considering not just the direct effects of decisions but also the indirect and downstream consequences.

Format: When discussing proposed actions or decisions, regularly ask: "And then what?" If we do this, what happens next? And after that? This simple question, asked repeatedly, pushes thinking beyond immediate effects to downstream consequences. A more structured version: What are the direct effects of this action (first-order)? What effects might those effects have (second-order)? Are there any third-order effects we should consider?

Extend this questioning beyond the immediate operational context: How might this affect other teams or departments? How might it affect external stakeholders? Are there environmental implications? Could this contribute to patterns we would not want to reinforce?

This need not be elaborate—often a few minutes of "and then what?" questioning is sufficient to surface important considerations that would otherwise be overlooked. The practice trains systemic thinking as a habit.

Team leader role: Ask the question regularly until it becomes a team habit. When second-order effects are identified, take them seriously—adjust plans accordingly or monitor for them after implementation.

Scaffold 4: Pattern identification discussions

Purpose: To build the team's ability to notice recurring patterns across situations, rather than treating each situation as unique, and to connect internal patterns to larger systemic dynamics.

Format: Periodically (monthly or quarterly), hold a discussion specifically focused on patterns the team is observing (45–60 minutes). Questions for such a discussion might include:

Internal patterns: What situations keep recurring? What problems do we solve repeatedly? Are there patterns in what goes well and what does not? Do we see the same dynamics playing out across different projects or situations?

External patterns: What patterns do we notice in our environment—among stakeholders, in our industry, in the broader context? Are there trends or shifts that might affect our work? Do we

see connections between what happens in our team and larger patterns in the organisation or beyond?

Connecting internal and external: Are there ways our internal patterns connect to or reflect larger systemic patterns? For example, if we repeatedly face time pressure, is that connected to broader industry or economic dynamics? If we keep encountering certain stakeholder concerns, does that reflect larger social trends?

When patterns are identified, explore them: What is causing this pattern to repeat? Is there something structural that produces it? If it is a problematic pattern, what would need to change for it to stop recurring? If it is a positive pattern, how can we reinforce and extend it?

Team leader role: Schedule and facilitate pattern discussions. Contribute your own observations of patterns. When patterns are identified, follow through with structural responses rather than just noting the pattern and moving on.

Adaptation: In larger departments, pattern identification can happen at sub-team level with periodic cross-team sessions to identify patterns that span organisational boundaries.

Connection to other IDGs: These scaffolds support Critical Thinking (by questioning simple cause-effect explanations), Long-Term Orientation (by considering delayed effects), Self-Awareness (by revealing team patterns), Perspective Skills (by revealing how different parts of a system see issues differently), and Connectedness (by making visible the team's relationships to larger systems).

When scaffolds for systems thinking aren't taking hold

If you've tried scaffolds for systems thinking and they're not working, consider:

Check the foundation: Systems thinking requires time for reflection that operational pressure often squeezes out. If the team is in constant reactive mode, there may be no space for the kind of slow, exploratory thinking that systems awareness requires.

Check for hidden constraints: What makes it difficult for systems thinking to develop? Is the work structured so that people only see their piece of a larger process? Do organisational systems reward quick fixes over systemic solutions? Is there pressure to stay "in your lane" that discourages thinking about broader connections?

Try a different entry point: The suggested scaffolds aren't the only way to develop systems thinking. If structured mapping exercises aren't working, capability might develop through: post-mortems of failures that reveal systemic causes, exposure to systems maps or analyses created by others (industry analyses, sustainability reports, systems diagrams), stories of unintended consequences that make the need for systems thinking vivid, or starting with very concrete, bounded systems before expanding scope.

Watch for oversimplification: Systems thinking can be reduced to a superficial exercise if the team maps obvious connections without genuine exploration. If mapping sessions produce tidy diagrams but no new insights, push for deeper engagement: What connections surprised us? What are we uncertain about? What would we need to learn to understand this system better?

5.4 Long-term orientation and visioning — Maintaining strategic perspective

What it means as a collective capability

At the individual level, long-term orientation and visioning mean imagining long-term goals and staying committed to them in ways that support broader well-being. At the team level, this becomes collective strategic perspective—the team's ability to maintain awareness of longer time horizons, connect daily work to future goals, and resist the constant pull of short-term urgencies that crowds out consideration of what matters over time. A team with this capability can hold both immediate demands and long-term direction simultaneously.

Long-term orientation extends beyond the team's own strategic goals to include awareness of longer-term consequences for others—for stakeholders, for communities, for the environment, and for future generations. Many of the most significant consequences of organisational activity unfold over years or decades: environmental impacts accumulate gradually, community relationships develop or deteriorate over time, and the effects of decisions on employee wellbeing, supplier relationships, and social trust compound across extended periods. Teams that can think in these longer timeframes are better positioned to make decisions that serve not only immediate organisational goals but also the broader wellbeing that sustainability and social responsibility require.

Why it matters at team level

Teams easily become absorbed in immediate tasks and short-term pressures. Urgent demands drive out important but non-urgent strategic work. Decisions get made based on what is convenient now without considering long-term implications. Over time, the team drifts, losing connection to its larger purpose and making choices that optimize short-term ease at the expense of long-term success. Teams that cultivate long-term orientation make better strategic trade-offs, invest appropriately in the future, and maintain coherence between daily actions and larger goals.

This matters especially when teams work in organisations that have made commitments to sustainability or social responsibility. Such commitments are inherently long-term: sustainability means meeting present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This requires the capacity to consider effects that extend beyond immediate planning horizons—effects on climate, on ecosystems, on communities, on the social fabric. Teams that cannot think beyond the next quarter or the current project will struggle to honor such commitments, even with the best intentions. Long-term orientation is not a luxury for strategic planning sessions; it is a necessary capability for responsible organisational action.

Scaffolds

Scaffold 1: Regular long-term reflection sessions

Purpose: To create recurring opportunities to step back from immediate work and consider longer time horizons—both for the team's own direction and for the broader consequences of its work.

Format: Quarterly or every six months, dedicate 60–90 minutes to a session focused specifically on longer-term perspective. The session addresses questions at multiple scales:

Team direction: Where do we want to be as a team in one year? In three years? What would success look like over a longer time horizon? Are our current activities aligned with where we

want to go? What should we be starting now that will matter later, even if it does not feel urgent today?

Broader consequences: What are the longer-term effects of our current work on those we serve? On other stakeholders? On communities affected by our activities? On the environment? Are there ways our current approach might create problems that only become visible over time? Are there opportunities to create long-term value that we are missing because of short-term focus?

Connecting to larger purposes: How does our work contribute to longer-term goals beyond our immediate organisational context—goals related to sustainability, social wellbeing, or the challenges described in the SDGs? Are there ways we could strengthen that contribution?

The session is not operational planning; it is strategic reflection. The goal is to ensure that the longer view remains present in team consciousness, informing ongoing decisions. Document key insights and return to them in subsequent sessions to maintain continuity.

Team leader role: Protect time for these sessions; they are easily crowded out by immediate demands. Facilitate to keep the discussion at a strategic level rather than sliding into operational details. Connect insights from these sessions to ongoing decision-making.

Scaffold 2: Future generations perspective

Purpose: To develop the capacity to consider how current decisions might affect those who come after—future employees, future communities, future generations—and to use this perspective to inform present choices.

Format: When facing significant decisions with lasting consequences, explicitly introduce the perspective of future stakeholders (15–30 minutes as part of decision process):

Future employees: How will the people who work here in five or ten years experience the consequences of this decision? What kind of organisation, culture, or situation are we creating for them?

Future communities: How will the communities affected by our work experience the long-term consequences? Are we creating lasting value or accumulating problems that others will have to address?

Future generations: If we extend our thinking further—to our children's generation or beyond—how does this decision look? Are we using resources, creating waste, or establishing patterns that will burden those who come after us? Are we contributing to a world they will want to inherit?

This practice does not mean every decision requires extensive future-generation analysis. Reserve it for decisions with significant long-term implications—major investments, strategic direction changes, policies that will be difficult to reverse, or decisions with environmental or community impact.

Team leader role: Introduce this perspective when facing relevant decisions. Model taking future stakeholders seriously, not as a rhetorical exercise but as genuine consideration. When future-generation concerns are raised, ensure they receive real weight in the decision process.

Scaffold 3: Daily-to-long-term connection practices

Purpose: To maintain a thread between daily work and longer-term goals, preventing them from becoming disconnected.

Format: Integrate brief long-term references into regular team meetings. This can be as simple as occasionally asking: "How does this relate to where we're trying to go over the next year?" When making decisions, prompt consideration of longer-term implications: "How will we feel about this decision in six months? In two years? In ten years?" When reviewing priorities, ask whether time allocation reflects long-term importance, not just short-term urgency.

Extend these questions to broader concerns when relevant: "How does this connect to our commitments regarding sustainability or social responsibility?" "What are the longer-term consequences for stakeholders or communities?" "Is this a decision we would be comfortable explaining to our children?"

These brief touchpoints keep longer horizons present without requiring extensive time. The aim is to make long-term thinking a habit rather than a separate activity.

Team leader role: Ask the long-term questions regularly. Model considering long-term implications in your own decision-making. When short-term pressures dominate, explicitly name the tension: "We're focused on immediate needs right now; let's make sure we come back to the longer view."

Scaffold 4: Multi-horizon tracking

Purpose: To make visible the team's progress and impact across multiple time horizons, ensuring attention to both short and long-term indicators.

Format: Create a simple tracking tool (a shared document, visual board, or dashboard) that includes indicators across at least three time horizons:

Operational indicators for current performance (weekly or monthly metrics)—how are we doing on immediate deliverables?

Strategic indicators for longer-term direction (quarterly or annual progress markers)—are we building toward where we want to be?

Impact indicators for broader and longer-term effects—what are the consequences of our work for stakeholders, communities, or environment over time? This might include stakeholder satisfaction trends, environmental metrics, community relationship indicators, or progress toward sustainability commitments.

Review the multi-horizon tracking in regular meetings—not just the operational metrics but also the strategic and impact indicators. This keeps all time horizons visible and prompts discussion when they diverge (for instance, when strong operational performance is coming at the expense of strategic investment or long-term stakeholder relationships).

Team leader role: Design the tracking system with input from the team. Ensure regular review of all horizons, not just the most urgent. Use the tracking to inform resource allocation decisions and priority-setting.

Scaffold 5: Long-term scenario exploration

Purpose: To develop the capacity to think about alternative futures and how current decisions might play out under different conditions—including conditions related to sustainability challenges and social change.

Format: Periodically (annually or when facing major strategic decisions), spend time exploring alternative future scenarios (90–120 minutes):

Identify key uncertainties: What factors that affect our work are genuinely uncertain? These might include market conditions, technological change, regulatory environment, climate impacts, social trends, or resource availability.

Develop contrasting scenarios: Create two to four plausible future scenarios that differ on key uncertainties. For example: a scenario where sustainability pressures intensify rapidly, a scenario where current trends continue, a scenario where economic disruption reshapes priorities.

Explore implications: For each scenario, ask: How would our current strategy fare? What would we wish we had done differently? What capabilities would we need? What risks would we face?

Identify robust actions: What actions make sense across multiple scenarios? What should we be doing now to prepare for different possible futures?

This exercise builds comfort with uncertainty and longer time horizons. It helps teams avoid the trap of planning only for a future that looks like the present.

Team leader role: Facilitate scenario exploration with genuine openness to different possibilities. Resist the temptation to quickly identify the "most likely" scenario and plan only for that. Ensure that scenarios include possibilities related to sustainability and social change, not just market or competitive factors.

Connection to other IDGs: These scaffolds support Inner Compass (by connecting daily work to larger purpose), Systems Thinking (by considering longer-term effects and feedback loops), Resilience (by maintaining perspective when immediate challenges feel overwhelming), Hope and Optimism (by maintaining connection to long-term positive possibilities), and Connectedness (by considering effects on future stakeholders and generations).

When scaffolds for long-term orientation aren't taking hold

If you've tried scaffolds for long-term orientation and they're not working, consider:

Check the foundation: Long-term thinking requires some degree of stability and psychological safety. If the team is in crisis mode, if people are uncertain about their own futures, or if organisational conditions change so rapidly that any long-term thinking feels pointless, these scaffolds will struggle to gain traction.

Check for hidden constraints: What makes it difficult for long-term orientation to develop? Do organisational reward systems focus entirely on short-term results? Is there pressure from leadership to deliver immediate outcomes with no space for strategic investment? Does the planning cycle (annual budgets, quarterly targets) make longer thinking feel irrelevant? Is there cynicism about long-term commitments based on past experience of abandoned initiatives?

Try a different entry point: The suggested scaffolds aren't the only way to develop long-term orientation. If structured practices aren't working, capability might develop through: connecting with the organisation's long-term vision or sustainability commitments in ways that feel meaningful, stories of long-term consequences (positive or negative) that make extended time horizons vivid, visiting or learning about the long-term effects of past decisions, or connecting with stakeholders who experience the long-term consequences of the team's work.

Address the cynicism directly: If team members have seen too many "strategic initiatives" come and go, they may resist long-term thinking as naïve. Address this directly: acknowledge the history, distinguish between genuine long-term orientation and organisational fads, and focus on what is actually within the team's control to influence over time.

5.5 Creativity — Generating new possibilities

What it means as a collective capability

At the individual level, creativity is the ability to think outside conventional patterns, imagine new possibilities, and shape them into transformative ideas. At the team level, this becomes collective creative capacity—the team’s ability to generate novel ideas, approaches, and solutions together. A team with strong collective creativity can move beyond established ways of doing things, combine different perspectives to produce innovations, and find new possibilities where others see only constraints.

Why it matters at team level

Teams often default to conventional approaches even when those approaches are not working well. Creativity is suppressed by time pressure, risk aversion, hierarchy, and norms that favor conformity over experimentation. The result is that teams miss opportunities for innovation and struggle to adapt when circumstances change. Teams that cultivate collective creativity can find better solutions to problems, adapt more readily to new situations, and create value that teams limited to conventional thinking cannot access.

Scaffolds

Scaffold 1: Dedicated exploration time

Purpose: To protect time specifically for creative exploration, separated from the pressure to produce immediate results.

Format: Allocate regular time (this might be a few hours monthly or a half-day quarterly) where the team explores new ideas without the requirement to deliver immediate outcomes. During this time, the team might explore questions like: What would we do if we could start from scratch? What assumptions about our work could be questioned? What are other teams or organisations doing that we could learn from? What experiments might we try?

The key is that exploration time is protected from the usual demands for efficiency and output. This does not mean it is unstructured; facilitated exploration often works better than unguided brainstorming. But the measure of success is not immediate practical application—it is the generation of new ideas and perspectives that may prove valuable over time.

Team leader role: Protect exploration time from being claimed by operational needs. Participate as a contributor, not just a manager of the process. Resist the pressure to immediately evaluate or critique ideas—exploration requires safety to think freely.

Scaffold 2: Creating permission for productive failure

Purpose: To reduce the fear of failure that suppresses experimentation and risk-taking.

Format: Explicitly establish that thoughtful experiments that do not succeed are valued, not punished. Distinguish productive failure (trying something reasonable that did not work, with learning as a result) from negligent failure (carelessness or repeating known mistakes). Celebrate productive failures by asking: What did we try? What did we learn? How does this inform what we do next?

Creating genuine permission requires consistent behavior over time. If a team member tries something creative that fails and is criticized or disadvantaged, the lesson spreads quickly: do

not take risks. Conversely, if learning from failed experiments is genuinely valued and recognised, people become more willing to try new approaches.

Team leader role: Model taking thoughtful risks yourself and being open about what you learn when they do not work out. Never punish genuine attempts to innovate that fail. Publicly recognise and thank people who tried something new, regardless of outcome. Distinguish clearly between productive failure and carelessness.

Scaffold 3: Structured ideation sessions

Purpose: To generate diverse ideas systematically when facing challenges or opportunities that would benefit from creative thinking.

Format: When facing a challenge that requires creative solutions, use a structured ideation process rather than unstructured discussion. Key principles: Separate generation from evaluation—first generate many ideas without critique, then evaluate. Use techniques that encourage divergent thinking: What would we do if we had unlimited resources? If we had to solve this in one day? If we approached it from a completely different field? Build on others' ideas rather than just listing separate ones. Include individual reflection time before group discussion to ensure diverse ideas surface.

Avoid common brainstorming failures: the loudest voices dominating, ideas being critiqued as soon as they are offered, and premature convergence on the first acceptable option. Structure the process to prevent these patterns.

Team leader role: Facilitate ideation sessions or arrange for facilitation. Enforce the separation of generation and evaluation. Contribute ideas but do not dominate. Value quantity in the generation phase; quality assessment comes later.

Scaffold 4: Cross-boundary exposure

Purpose: To bring in perspectives and ideas from outside the team's usual context, which is a significant source of creative insight.

Format: Create regular opportunities for the team to learn from outside its usual boundaries. This might include: Inviting someone from another team or department to share how they approach similar challenges. Learning sessions where team members share relevant ideas from outside the organisation (conferences, articles, other industries). Site visits or exchanges with other teams or organisations. Periodic "fresh eyes" sessions where someone unfamiliar with the team's work offers observations and questions.

Creative breakthroughs often come from recombining ideas across domains. Teams that remain isolated within their own expertise miss these opportunities. Regular exposure to different perspectives expands the raw material available for creative thinking.

Team leader role: Create and protect opportunities for cross-boundary learning. Encourage team members to seek and share outside perspectives. When new ideas surface from external sources, explore how they might apply to the team's context.

Connection to other IDGs: These scaffolds support Openness and Learning Mindset (by valuing experimentation and new perspectives), Perspective Skills (by drawing on diverse viewpoints), and Courage (since creative work requires willingness to take risks and challenge conventions).

Summary: The Thinking dimension

The scaffolds in this section address how teams think together: examining ideas critically, integrating diverse perspectives, understanding complex systems, maintaining strategic perspective, and generating creative possibilities. These collective thinking capabilities are not simply the sum of individual cognitive skills; they emerge from structures and practices that enable the team to think better than any member could alone.

Many of these scaffolds involve slowing down the thinking process—asking questions before accepting conclusions, considering multiple perspectives before converging, mapping systems before intervening. This deliberate slowing feels inefficient in the moment but produces better outcomes over time. Teams that rush past the thinking phase to get to action often end up spending more time correcting avoidable mistakes than they would have spent thinking more carefully in the first place.

Start with the scaffolds that address your team’s most pressing thinking gaps. A team that tends toward groupthink might prioritize the designated challenger role and pre-mortem analysis. A team that makes decisions without considering stakeholder impacts might focus on perspective-taking practices. A team overwhelmed by short-term demands might benefit most from long-term orientation scaffolds. Whatever your starting point, the aim is to build your team’s capacity to understand situations more fully and make wiser decisions.

When scaffolds for the Thinking dimension aren’t taking hold

If you’ve tried scaffolds for Thinking capabilities and they’re not working, consider:

Check the foundation: Some capabilities depend on others. For Critical Thinking scaffolds, check if psychological safety is sufficient for people to actually challenge ideas. For Perspective Skills, check if power dynamics allow minority views to be heard. For Systems Thinking, check if there’s enough time and space for complex analysis.

Check for hidden constraints: What makes it difficult for collective thinking to develop? Is decision-making so rushed that there’s no time for analysis? Do organisational systems reward quick action over thoughtful consideration? Are there penalties for questioning senior leaders’ ideas? Is the work structured in ways that prevent people from seeing connections?

Try a different entry point: The suggested scaffolds aren’t the only way to develop Thinking capabilities. If structured practices aren’t working, capability might develop through: bringing in external perspectives that naturally introduce new viewpoints, post-mortems of actual failures that reveal gaps in thinking, individual analysis that people share in less formal settings, or connecting to external frameworks (systems maps from other sources, futures scenarios).

Accept current limits: Sometimes a team isn’t ready for sophisticated collective thinking, and forcing it creates resistance. It may be more productive to: build foundational capabilities first (psychological safety, basic communication), wait for a crisis that makes better thinking obviously necessary, accept that this particular team may think differently but not necessarily worse, or focus on areas where the team already thinks well and build from there.

6. Relating — Caring for others and the world

The Relating dimension addresses something deeper than interpersonal skills or stakeholder management. It concerns the fundamental orientation or posture from which a team encounters others and the world—the quality of attention and care that shapes how the team relates to colleagues, to stakeholders, to communities, and to the larger wholes of which it is part.

At the individual level, Relating encompasses appreciation, connectedness, humility, empathy and compassion, and forgiveness. These are not merely techniques for better relationships; they are qualities of heart that shape how we meet existence itself. At the team level, these qualities manifest as a collective orientation—a shared way of being that influences everything the team does.

Consider the difference between a team that views stakeholders instrumentally (as means to organisational ends) and a team that genuinely cares about stakeholder wellbeing. Or the difference between a team that sees environmental responsibility as a constraint to be managed and a team that feels genuine connection to the ecosystems affected by its work. The actions might sometimes look similar, but the underlying orientation is fundamentally different—and over time, that difference shapes everything.

Teams that develop collective capability in the Relating dimension create environments where people feel valued not just for their productivity but as human beings. They maintain awareness of their connections to larger wholes—the organisation, the community, humanity, the living world—and act from genuine care for those wholes rather than narrow self-interest. They approach their work with appropriate humility, recognising the limits of their knowledge and the validity of perspectives different from their own. They attend to suffering and struggle with compassion rather than indifference. When relationships are damaged or divisions arise, they work toward healing rather than perpetuating cycles of blame and resentment.

This orientation matters not only for team health but for the team's capacity to contribute meaningfully to challenges that matter. The Sustainable Development Goals and similar aspirations call for collaboration, for considering those who are distant or different, for caring about future generations and other species. Such commitments can be pursued as external obligations, but they become authentic only when grounded in genuine care—when the team actually feels its connection to larger wholes and responds with appropriate concern. The scaffolds in this chapter support the development of this deeper orientation alongside the practical relational capabilities that serve immediate team effectiveness.

6.1 Appreciation — Cultivating gratitude and recognising value

What it means as a collective capability

At the individual level, appreciation means relating to people and the world with a deep sense of gratitude, positive regard, and joy. At the team level, this becomes a collective orientation of appreciation—a shared capacity to notice and acknowledge what is valuable, to express gratitude for contributions, and to maintain positive regard even when work is difficult.

Appreciation begins with a basic posture of gratitude rather than entitlement. Teams can operate from a stance that takes everything for granted—the efforts of colleagues, the support systems that enable their work, the natural world that sustains all activity—or from a stance that recognises how much is given, how much depends on others, how much is worthy of wonder rather than indifference. This orientation then naturally expresses itself in specific practices of recognising contributions and celebrating achievements.

Why it matters at team level

People need to feel that their contributions matter. When appreciation is absent, motivation erodes, commitment weakens, and talented people disengage or leave. Teams that focus only on problems and shortcomings create depleting environments where work becomes draining rather than energizing. By contrast, teams that cultivate appreciation sustain motivation and engagement, build stronger relationships, and create environments where people want to contribute their best work.

Beyond its effects on team morale, an orientation of appreciation changes how teams relate to the wider world. Teams that cultivate genuine gratitude become more aware of what they depend on—the communities that support them, the ecosystems that sustain them, the efforts of countless others that make their work possible. This awareness can inform more responsible decision-making and deeper commitment to reciprocity rather than extraction.

Scaffolds

Scaffold 1: Regular appreciation rounds

Purpose: To create recurring opportunities for team members to express appreciation for each other's contributions and to cultivate the habit of noticing what is valuable.

Format: Include a brief appreciation round in regular team meetings (weekly or biweekly). Each person has the opportunity (not requirement) to acknowledge something a colleague has done that they appreciate. Keep it brief and specific: "I want to appreciate Maria for taking time to help me finish the report" or "I appreciated how Jonas handled that difficult conversation with the client."

Periodically extend appreciation beyond immediate colleagues: to support staff whose work often goes unacknowledged, to partner teams, to those in the supply chain or community who contribute to the team's ability to do its work.

Team leader role: Model by regularly offering specific appreciations yourself. Ensure the practice continues consistently. Notice if certain team members rarely receive appreciation and find genuine reasons to recognise them.

Scaffold 2: Milestone celebrations and pausing to appreciate

Purpose: To mark significant achievements and to counteract the tendency to rush past accomplishments without acknowledgment.

Format: When the team completes a significant project, reaches a goal, or navigates a difficult period successfully, take time to pause and appreciate. This need not be elaborate—it might be a brief acknowledgment in a meeting, a team lunch, or simply stopping to say "we did this together, and it matters."

Occasionally extend this practice to appreciation for what the team depends on: the organisation's investment in the team, the community context that enables the work, the natural systems that sustain all activity. This is not about being preachy but about cultivating genuine awareness of interdependence.

Team leader role: Identify moments worthy of celebration and ensure they are marked. Resist the pressure to immediately move on to the next challenge.

Scaffold 3: Appreciative framing in team discourse

Purpose: To balance attention to problems with attention to what is working, preventing the team discourse from becoming exclusively deficit-focused.

Format: When discussing team performance or reviewing work, deliberately include appreciative questions alongside problem-focused ones: Before discussing what went wrong, ask what went well. When reviewing a period of work, ask: What are we proud of? What worked better than expected? When facing challenges, ask: What resources and capabilities do we have to draw on? What similar challenges have we navigated well in the past?

This is not about ignoring problems or being falsely positive. It is about ensuring that team attention includes what is working and what is given, not only what is broken or lacking. Over time, this creates a more balanced and sustainable team culture.

Team leader role: Ask appreciative questions regularly, especially when the team is struggling. Model noticing and naming what is working. When team discourse becomes exclusively negative, deliberately shift to appreciative inquiry without dismissing legitimate concerns.

Connection to other IDGs: These scaffolds support Hope and Optimism (by maintaining awareness of positive developments), Relationship-Building Skills (by strengthening interpersonal bonds), Connectedness (by cultivating awareness of interdependence), and Resilience (by building emotional resources that sustain the team through difficulties).

6.2 Connectedness — Belonging to larger wholes

What it means as a collective capability

At the individual level, connectedness means feeling a sense of belonging to a larger whole—humanity, the community of life, the living Earth. At the team level, this becomes collective awareness of belonging—the team's felt sense that it exists within and as part of larger systems, and that its wellbeing is intertwined with the wellbeing of those larger wholes.

This is perhaps the most foundational quality in the Relating dimension. When connectedness is genuinely felt—not just intellectually acknowledged—it naturally gives rise to care. We protect what we feel we belong to. We consider the effects of our actions on systems we experience ourselves as part of. The commitment to sustainability, to social responsibility, to contributing to SDG-related goals becomes not an external obligation but an expression of care for what we are connected to.

Connectedness operates at multiple scales: connection to colleagues and team, connection to the organisation and its stakeholders, connection to the broader community, connection to humanity as a whole, connection to the living planet. Teams that cultivate this felt sense of belonging at wider scales develop a different relationship to their work—one grounded in care for the whole rather than narrow self-interest.

Why it matters at team level

Teams that lose awareness of their connections to larger systems make decisions that optimize locally while creating problems elsewhere. They fail to consider how their work affects other teams, stakeholders, communities, or ecosystems. They can become insular and self-focused, losing sight of the larger purpose their work serves.

More fundamentally, teams without felt connectedness struggle to authentically commit to purposes larger than their immediate interests. Sustainability initiatives become box-checking

exercises. Social responsibility becomes public relations. SDG alignment becomes rhetoric. When connectedness is genuinely present, these commitments become expressions of who the team is, not external requirements imposed upon it.

Scaffolds

Scaffold 1: Making connections vivid and real

Purpose: To move connectedness from abstraction to felt reality by creating direct contact with those the team is connected to.

Format: Periodically (quarterly or as opportunities arise), create experiences that make the team's connections tangible:

- Invite stakeholders, customers, or community members to share their experience of how the team's work affects them
- Visit sites where the team's work has impact—communities served, environments affected, operations that depend on the team's outputs
- Learn about the people in the supply chain or support systems that enable the team's work—who are they, what are their lives like, what do they need?
- When direct contact isn't possible, use stories, images, or data that make distant connections real rather than abstract

The goal is not to create guilt but to cultivate genuine awareness of relationship. When we know the people and places we affect, we naturally care more about how we affect them.

Team leader role: Create opportunities for connection. Treat these as valuable investments, not distractions from "real work." Help the team process what they learn and consider implications for how they work.

Scaffold 2: Reflecting on belonging to larger wholes

Purpose: To cultivate the felt sense of belonging to larger systems—not just intellectual acknowledgment but genuine experience of being part of something larger.

Format: Periodically (perhaps quarterly), create space for reflection on the team's place in larger contexts (45–60 minutes). This might explore:

- Our team within the organisation: What is our role in the larger whole? How does our work contribute to the organisation's purpose? What would be missing if we weren't here?
- Our organisation within community: How does our organisation affect the communities it operates in? What does it depend on from those communities? What responsibilities come with that relationship?
- Our work within larger systems: How does what we do connect to broader social and environmental systems? Are we contributing to patterns we would want to strengthen, or patterns we would want to change?

This is not about creating grand strategic plans but about cultivating felt awareness of belonging. Some teams may find this kind of reflection natural; others may find it unfamiliar. Start where the team is and let awareness develop gradually.

Team leader role: Create and protect space for this reflection. Participate genuinely rather than facilitating from outside. Share your own sense of how the team's work connects to larger purposes.

Scaffold 3: Connectedness in decision-making

Purpose: To ensure that awareness of connections informs actual decisions, not just periodic reflection.

Format: When facing significant decisions, include explicit consideration of connections: How does this decision affect those we are connected to—stakeholders, communities, ecosystems? Are we considering our responsibilities to these larger wholes, or only our immediate interests? Would we be comfortable explaining this decision to those it affects?

This need not be lengthy—often a few minutes of explicit consideration is sufficient. The goal is to make connectedness present in the moments when it matters most—when decisions are being made that will affect others.

Team leader role: Prompt connectedness considerations when relevant decisions arise. Model taking these considerations seriously rather than treating them as formalities. When decisions might significantly affect those beyond the team, ensure their perspectives are genuinely considered.

Connection to other IDGs: These scaffolds support Inner Compass (by connecting work to larger purpose), Systems Thinking (by maintaining awareness of how the team fits within larger systems), Empathy and Compassion (by keeping the experience of others visible), and Long-Term Orientation (by considering effects on future stakeholders).

6.3 Humility — Groundedness and openness

What it means as a collective capability

At the individual level, humility means being able to respond to the needs of the situation without concern for one's own importance—maintaining an appropriate sense of one's place. At the team level, this becomes collective humility—the team's capacity to remain grounded, to acknowledge limitations and mistakes, to remain genuinely open to learning from others, and to prioritize the work over the team's image or status.

Humility includes what might be called epistemic humility—appropriate modesty about what we know, especially regarding complex systems whose behavior we cannot fully predict. Teams working on challenges connected to sustainability or social change are inevitably dealing with such complexity. Humility means acknowledging uncertainty, remaining open to being wrong, and approaching challenges with curiosity rather than false confidence.

Humility also means openness to perspectives we might be tempted to dismiss—the views of critics, of those with less status, of people from different cultures or value systems. A humble team does not assume its perspective is simply correct while others are mistaken; it recognises that its own view is partial and shaped by its position.

Why it matters at team level

Teams can develop collective arrogance—an inflated sense of their own capabilities, a dismissive attitude toward others, and a defensiveness about mistakes that prevents learning. Such teams are difficult to work with, miss valuable input from others, and fail to improve because they cannot acknowledge what is not working.

Humble teams build better relationships with colleagues and stakeholders because they do not claim to have all the answers. They learn more effectively because they remain genuinely open to feedback. They approach complex challenges more wisely because they acknowledge what they do not know rather than proceeding with false confidence.

Scaffolds

Scaffold 1: Deliberate learning from others

Purpose: To cultivate the habit of seeking and valuing input from outside the team, including from sources the team might be tempted to overlook or dismiss.

Format: Create regular opportunities to learn from people outside the team:

- Invite colleagues from other teams to share their expertise or perspectives
- Seek feedback from stakeholders and discuss it genuinely rather than defensively
- When facing challenges, ask "who might have insight we lack?" rather than assuming the team must solve everything itself
- Deliberately seek perspectives the team might be inclined to dismiss—critics, people with different values, those with less organisational status but relevant experience

Team leader role: Model humility by seeking input yourself and acknowledging when others have better ideas. Create opportunities for the team to learn from external sources. Recognise and appreciate team members who bring outside perspectives.

Scaffold 2: Normalising acknowledgment of limitations and uncertainty

Purpose: To create a team culture where acknowledging what you do not know and admitting mistakes is normal and valued.

Format: Build explicit norms around acknowledging limitations. The team leader goes first by regularly modeling: "I don't know" when uncertain, "I was wrong about that" when mistaken, "I need help with this" when struggling, and "We think this will work, but we're uncertain about..." when facing complexity.

When others acknowledge limitations or mistakes, respond with appreciation rather than criticism. This creates a culture where people do not need to pretend to know more than they do or hide mistakes—resulting in better decisions and faster problem resolution.

Team leader role: Your behavior sets the tone. Model vulnerability consistently. When team members acknowledge limitations, thank them explicitly.

Scaffold 3: Focus on contribution over credit

Purpose: To shift team culture toward valuing contribution to shared goals rather than individual recognition and credit-claiming.

Format: Cultivate norms and practices that emphasize contribution over credit. When discussing successes, emphasize collaborative effort rather than individual heroes. Share credit broadly rather than claiming it narrowly. When representing the team externally, use "we" rather than "I." Notice and address patterns of credit-hoarding or competitive self-promotion within the team.

This does not mean individual contributions should not be recognised—the appreciation practices described earlier are important. Rather, it means the team’s culture emphasizes shared purpose over individual advancement, and team members focus on doing good work rather than ensuring they get credit for it.

Team leader role: Model giving credit to others. When the team succeeds, ensure recognition is shared broadly. When you receive individual credit for team accomplishments, redirect attention to collaborative effort. Address competitive dynamics if they emerge.

Connection to other IDGs: These scaffolds support Openness and Learning Mindset (by creating safety to acknowledge uncertainty), Integrity and Authenticity (by reducing pressure to pretend), Perspective Skills (by valuing different viewpoints), and Relationship-Building Skills (since humility builds trust with others).

6.4 Empathy and compassion — Caring for wellbeing

What it means as a collective capability

At the individual level, empathy and compassion mean connecting to others with kindness, care, and the intention to reduce suffering. At the team level, this becomes a collective caring orientation—the team's capacity to attend genuinely to the wellbeing of its members, to notice when people are struggling, and to respond with kindness rather than indifference.

A caring orientation extends beyond those immediately present. Teams can cultivate the capacity to care about those they affect but rarely see—distant stakeholders, future generations, communities and ecosystems impacted by organisational activities. This extended empathy is what makes commitments to sustainability and social responsibility genuine rather than performative. When we actually care about those we affect, we naturally consider their wellbeing in our decisions.

Why it matters at team level

People bring their whole selves to work, including their struggles and difficult circumstances. Teams that ignore the human dimension create environments that are draining and alienating. When people are struggling, unsupported teams leave them isolated. By contrast, teams that cultivate empathy and compassion create psychological safety, build deeper trust, and sustain engagement even through difficult periods.

Beyond internal team health, a caring orientation shapes how teams relate to the wider world. Teams that genuinely care about those they affect—not just those with power or proximity—make different decisions than teams focused only on narrow organisational interests.

Scaffolds

Scaffold 1: Building and maintaining psychological safety

Purpose: To create an environment where team members feel safe to express themselves, take risks, and be vulnerable without fear of negative consequences.

Format: Psychological safety is built through consistent behavior over time: Respond constructively when people take interpersonal risks. Frame failures as learning opportunities rather than occasions for blame. Explicitly invite input, especially from quieter team members. Acknowledge your own limitations and mistakes.

Periodic assessment can help: ask the team how safe people feel to speak up, whether they feel their perspectives are valued, and whether there are topics that feel too risky to raise.

Team leader role: Model vulnerability. Respond constructively when people speak up, especially when they share difficult messages. Never punish honesty. Notice and address patterns that undermine safety.

Scaffold 2: Noticing and responding to struggles

Purpose: To ensure that when team members are struggling—whether with work challenges or personal difficulties—the team notices and responds supportively.

Format: Create practices that help the team stay attuned to member wellbeing: Check-ins that invite sharing about how people are doing, not just task updates. One-on-one conversations with attention to wellbeing alongside work topics. Peer support norms where team members check in with each other informally.

When someone is struggling, respond: asking how you can help, adjusting workload if appropriate, simply acknowledging the difficulty. Sometimes the most compassionate response is letting someone know they are seen and supported.

Team leader role: Stay attuned to your team members. When you notice someone struggling, reach out. Create regular touchpoints that invite sharing.

Scaffold 3: Extending the circle of care

Purpose: To cultivate the team's capacity to care about those beyond its immediate boundaries—stakeholders, communities, and others affected by the team's work.

Format: Periodically (perhaps quarterly), deliberately extend empathic attention beyond the team (30–45 minutes): Who is affected by our work that we rarely think about? What are their lives like? What challenges do they face? What do they need from us?

This can draw on the "making connections vivid" practices from Connectedness—when we know the people we affect as real human beings rather than abstractions, we naturally care more about their wellbeing.

Team leader role: Create space for this reflection. Help the team move from abstract stakeholder categories to real human beings with lives, struggles, and needs.

Scaffold 4: Compassionate accountability

Purpose: To address performance issues and behavioral concerns in ways that maintain care for the person while being honest about the problem.

Format: Compassion does not mean avoiding difficult conversations or ignoring problems. When issues need to be addressed, do so with both honesty and care:

- Be direct while remaining kind: Name the concern clearly without harsh judgment.
- Seek to understand: What circumstances may be contributing to the problem?
- Focus on behavior and impact: Address what can change rather than judging character.
- Work collaboratively toward solutions: Partner with the person to find a way forward.

- Follow up: Ensure both that the issue is being addressed and that the person feels supported.

Compassionate accountability is not soft—standards are maintained and issues are addressed. But it is humane—people are treated as worthy of care even when they are struggling to meet expectations.

Team leader role: Develop your capacity for difficult conversations that combine honesty with care. Address issues directly rather than avoiding or delaying. Maintain care for the person even while being clear about the problem. Ensure that accountability conversations are private and respectful.

Connection to other IDGs: These scaffolds support Presence (by creating attunement to how people are doing), Communication Skills (by modeling caring communication), Connectedness (by extending care beyond the immediate team), and Forgiveness (by creating conditions where repair is possible).

6.5 Forgiveness — Transcending division and working toward healing

What it means as a collective capability

At the individual level, forgiveness means willingness to transcend hostility, work through harm, and create space for healing. At the team level, this becomes collective capacity for repair and reconciliation—the team's ability to acknowledge when harm has occurred, to work through damage rather than letting it fester, and to move forward together rather than remaining trapped in cycles of blame and resentment.

This capacity extends beyond repairing specific interpersonal harms. Teams exist in contexts full of division—tensions with other departments, conflicts with stakeholders, historical grievances, polarized positions on difficult issues. The capacity to work through division rather than perpetuating it is essential for teams that want to contribute to shared challenges. Without some capacity for forgiveness and reconciliation, collaboration across difference becomes impossible.

Forgiveness does not mean pretending harm did not happen or avoiding accountability. It means being willing to not let past harm determine the future—creating possibility for relationships and collaboration that would otherwise be blocked by accumulated resentment.

Why it matters at team level

In any team, people will sometimes hurt each other—through thoughtless words, unfair actions, broken commitments, or genuine mistakes. When harm occurs and is not addressed, it accumulates: resentments build, trust erodes, and relationships become superficial or hostile. Teams that develop capacity for repair can recover from conflicts, learn from them, and emerge with stronger relationships.

Beyond internal team dynamics, the capacity to work through division matters for the team's external relationships. Teams that carry resentments toward other departments, toward leadership, toward external critics, or toward stakeholders with different views limit their own capacity for collaboration. The aspiration toward healing rather than perpetuating division is essential for working on challenges that require cooperation across boundaries.

Scaffolds

Scaffold 1: Norms for addressing harm directly

Purpose: To establish team expectations that when harm occurs, it will be acknowledged and addressed rather than ignored or left to fester.

Format: Discuss and establish team norms around addressing harm: When someone feels harmed by a colleague's actions, the expectation is that they will raise it (directly or with support) rather than silently resenting. When someone learns they have harmed a colleague, the expectation is that they will acknowledge it and seek to repair. The team leader creates space and support for these conversations.

These conversations are difficult and most people avoid them. Establishing explicit norms makes it more likely that harm will be addressed rather than accumulating.

Team leader role: Establish and reinforce norms. Offer support for difficult conversations. When you become aware of unaddressed harm, encourage and support its resolution.

Scaffold 2: Structured approach to repair

Purpose: To provide a framework for repair conversations when harm has occurred.

Format: When addressing harm, a repair conversation typically moves through stages: The harmed person describes the impact—not to attack, but to help the other person understand. The person who caused harm listens fully, without defending. The person who caused harm acknowledges the impact and takes responsibility. Both discuss what would help repair the relationship. Both commit to moving forward.

This process is not easy and may need multiple conversations. The team leader or a neutral third party may need to facilitate.

Team leader role: Be available to facilitate repair conversations. Model repair in your own relationships—when you cause harm, acknowledge it and work to repair.

Scaffold 3: Working through collective resentments and divisions

Purpose: To address patterns of division that limit the team's capacity—resentments toward other groups, polarized positions, accumulated grievances.

Format: Periodically (or when tensions are evident), create space to examine whether the team is carrying resentments or grievances that are limiting its energy and capacity (45–60 minutes):

- Are there other teams, departments, or external groups we resent or dismiss? What is the history behind that? Is the resentment serving us, or is it limiting our capacity to collaborate?
- Are there polarized positions within the team where we've stopped genuinely listening to each other?
- Are there patterns where we contribute to cycles of blame rather than working toward resolution?

This is not about forced forgiveness or pretending legitimate grievances don't exist. It is about honest examination of what we're carrying and whether it serves us. Sometimes grievances are legitimate and need to be addressed through appropriate channels. Sometimes they are habits that limit us without serving any purpose.

Team leader role: Create safety for honest examination. Model willingness to examine your own resentments and contributions to division. Help the team distinguish between grievances that need action and resentments that can be released.

Connection to other IDGs: These scaffolds support Empathy and Compassion (by addressing harm caringly), Communication Skills (since repair requires difficult conversations), Self-Awareness (through reflection on patterns in conflict), Integrity (by ensuring harm is not ignored), and Connectedness (by removing barriers to relationship).

Summary: The Relating dimension

The scaffolds in this section address the fundamental orientation from which a team encounters others and the world. They help teams cultivate appreciation rather than entitlement, felt connectedness to larger wholes rather than insularity, genuine humility rather than arrogance, caring attention to wellbeing rather than indifference, and the capacity for healing rather than perpetuating division.

These qualities are not secondary to the "real work" of the team—they are foundational to it. Work happens through relationships, and the quality of those relationships depends on the orientation from which people meet each other. When this orientation is one of appreciation, connectedness, humility, care, and willingness to heal, teams function better and contribute more meaningfully to purposes beyond themselves.

These qualities also provide the inner foundation for authentic commitment to larger purposes. When teams genuinely feel their connection to larger wholes—to communities, to humanity, to the living world—commitment to sustainability and social responsibility becomes natural rather than imposed. The scaffolds in this chapter support both immediate team health and this deeper orientation toward the world.

Start with the scaffolds that address your team's most pressing relational needs or that resonate with where the team already has strength. A team where people feel undervalued might prioritize appreciation practices. A team that has become insular might focus on connectedness scaffolds. A team carrying unresolved conflicts needs to develop capacity for repair. Whatever your starting point, the aim is to cultivate an orientation of care that extends from immediate colleagues to the wider world.

When scaffolds for the Relating dimension aren't taking hold

If you've tried scaffolds for Relating capabilities and they're not working, consider:

Check for authenticity: These qualities cannot be faked. If appreciation practices become performative, if connectedness discussions feel like empty exercises, if empathy is expressed without genuine care behind it, people will sense the inauthenticity and disengage. Better to do less with genuine feeling than more as empty ritual.

Check the foundation: Relating scaffolds require basic trust and safety. If the team has experienced betrayals, broken commitments, or unaddressed harm, formal practices will feel hollow. The foundation may need repair before relational orientation can develop.

Check for cultural resistance: The orientation cultivated here may feel countercultural in organisational contexts that prize efficiency, competition, and instrumental relationships. Some team members may find this language uncomfortable or may have had bad experiences with similar concepts used manipulatively. Acknowledge this and focus on what's genuine rather than forcing adoption of language or practices that don't fit.

Try a different entry point: The suggested scaffolds aren't the only way to develop relating capabilities. If formal practices aren't working, orientation might shift through: shared experiences that create genuine connection, small acts of mutual support that build trust gradually, addressing specific relationship problems directly, or simply modeling the orientation yourself and letting it spread organically.

Start small and genuine: A small genuine shift in orientation matters more than elaborate practices that remain superficial. If the team isn't ready for extensive relational work, focus on one or two practices that feel authentic and let the orientation develop gradually.

7. Collaborating — Building trust and working together

The Collaborating dimension addresses how a team works together and with others to accomplish shared goals. At the individual level, Collaborating encompasses relationship-building skills, inclusive mindset and intercultural competence, co-creation skills, communication skills, and mobilisation skills. At the team level, these become collective capabilities for building strong working relationships, welcoming and integrating diverse perspectives, creating together rather than merely dividing work, communicating effectively across differences, and engaging others in shared purpose.

Teams that develop collective capability in the Collaborating dimension work together in ways that produce results none could achieve alone. They build trust that enables risk-taking and honest communication. They genuinely include diverse perspectives rather than merely tolerating difference. They create together—generating ideas, solving problems, and making decisions as a collective rather than simply aggregating individual contributions. They communicate in ways that build understanding rather than confusion or conflict. They can engage others beyond the team in shared work.

These capabilities matter because most significant work requires collaboration—and not only within the team. Teams exist within larger systems: they depend on and interact with other teams, departments, stakeholders, partners, and external audiences. The quality of these external relationships often determines whether the team’s work has impact beyond its immediate activities. A team that collaborates effectively internally but poorly with others will find its influence limited and its work disconnected from larger purposes.

Addressing complex global challenges requires collaboration across boundaries—between disciplines, sectors, cultures, and perspectives. The collaborative capabilities in this dimension enable teams not only to work well together internally but to engage effectively with diverse stakeholders and partners in service of shared purposes. Whether working directly on sustainability, social equity, or other SDG-related challenges, or contributing to these larger goals through their everyday work, teams need the capacity to build relationships, include diverse perspectives, co-create with others, communicate across differences, and mobilise collective action.

7.1 Relationship-building skills — Creating foundations of trust

What it means as a collective capability

At the individual level, relationship-building skills mean nurturing relationships with emotional intelligence grounded in trust, respect, mutual understanding, and a spirit of collaboration. At the team level, this becomes collective relational capability—the team’s capacity to build and maintain strong working relationships both among its members and with those beyond its boundaries: other teams, departments, stakeholders, and external partners.

Teams vary enormously in their relational quality, both internally and externally. Internally, some teams have members who know each other only superficially, while in others, relationships are strong enough to withstand disagreement and difficulty. Externally, some teams are isolated, maintaining only transactional relationships with others, while other teams are well-connected, with strong relationships across organisational boundaries that enable effective collaboration.

Both dimensions matter. Internal relational strength provides the foundation for a team that can work well together. External relational strength determines whether the team can collaborate

effectively with others, access resources and information, and have influence beyond its immediate scope. Neither dimension automatically produces the other—teams can be internally cohesive but externally isolated, or externally well-connected but internally fragmented.

Scaffolds

Scaffold 1: Dedicated time for relationship-building

Purpose: Relationships develop through interaction, and interaction requires time. Many teams allocate time only for task work, assuming relationships will develop naturally. They rarely do. Creating dedicated time for relationship-building signals that relationships matter and provides the space for them to develop—both within the team and across its boundaries.

Format: This can take multiple forms depending on team context and preferences.

For internal relationships: Informal gatherings such as team lunches, coffee breaks, or shared activities provide low-pressure opportunities to know each other beyond work roles. These should be genuinely optional and scheduled with consideration for different life circumstances—not everyone can attend evening events, and some people prefer not to socialise outside work hours. More structured options include periodic team sessions focused on getting to know each other better: sharing personal stories, discussing life outside work, or exploring each other’s backgrounds and interests.

For relationships across boundaries: Consider periodic informal connections with members of teams you work closely with—joint coffee sessions, shared lunches, or informal check-ins that are not about immediate task coordination. When starting significant collaborations with external partners, invest time in getting to know each other before diving into task work. This early investment pays dividends when challenges arise later.

For distributed teams, relationship-building requires extra attention. Virtual social time rarely develops organically—it needs to be created deliberately. Options include virtual coffee sessions, online social activities, or investing in periodic in-person gatherings for teams that primarily work remotely.

Team leader role: Prioritise relationship-building as legitimate use of team time. Create and protect opportunities for non-task interaction, both internally and with key external collaborators. Participate authentically—share something of yourself while respecting boundaries. Notice who is not participating and consider whether adjustments might help include them.

Scaffold 2: Building and maintaining psychological safety

Purpose: Psychological safety—the sense that one can speak up, take risks, and be honest without fear of negative consequences—is essential for effective teamwork. Without it, people withhold ideas, hide problems, avoid necessary risks, and pretend to agree when they do not. Research consistently shows that psychological safety is a key predictor of team performance.

Format: Psychological safety is built through consistent behaviour over time rather than through any single intervention. Key practices include responding well when people take interpersonal risks such as asking questions, admitting uncertainty, or raising concerns. If someone is ridiculed, dismissed, or punished for speaking up, psychological safety erodes rapidly. Conversely, when honesty and vulnerability are met with appreciation and constructive response, safety builds.

Frame failures and mistakes as learning opportunities rather than occasions for blame. When something goes wrong, focus on understanding what happened and how to improve rather than on who is at fault. Explicitly invite input, especially from quieter team members. Ask directly for perspectives and make clear that diverse views are welcomed. Acknowledge your own limitations and mistakes. When leaders demonstrate that it is safe to be imperfect, others become more willing to take similar risks.

Periodic assessment can help: ask the team how safe people feel to speak up, whether they feel their perspectives are valued, and whether there are topics that feel too risky to raise. This must be done carefully—if people do not feel safe, they may not answer honestly.

Team leader role: Model vulnerability by admitting your own uncertainties and mistakes. Respond constructively when people speak up, especially when they share difficult messages. Never punish honesty. Notice and address patterns that undermine safety, such as certain people being interrupted or dismissed.

Scaffold 3: Building and maintaining relationships across team boundaries

Purpose: Teams do not work in isolation. They depend on other teams for inputs, handoffs, information, and support. They work with external stakeholders and partners. The quality of these relationships significantly affects the team's ability to accomplish its goals. Yet external relationships often get deprioritised when workload increases—they feel less urgent than internal work, even when they are equally important.

Format: Start by mapping the team's key external relationships. Which other teams do you depend on or who depend on you? Which stakeholders are most important to your work? Which external partners do you collaborate with? For each significant relationship, consider: What is the current state of this relationship? What does the other party need from us? What do we need from them? Who is responsible for maintaining this relationship?

Establish regular touchpoints with key collaborators. This might be periodic check-ins with counterparts in other teams, regular updates to important stakeholders, or scheduled coordination meetings with partners. The frequency should match the relationship's importance and the pace of work—weekly coordination with closely interdependent teams, monthly or quarterly with others.

Invest in understanding others' contexts. What pressures are they under? What are their priorities and constraints? What does success look like from their perspective? This understanding enables more effective collaboration and helps prevent conflicts that arise from misunderstanding each other's situations.

Practice reciprocity. Relationships are strengthened when both parties invest in them. Look for opportunities to help your collaborators, share useful information proactively, and be responsive when they need something. A pattern of mutual support creates relationships that can withstand occasional difficulties.

Team leader role: Assign clear responsibility for key external relationships—without clarity, these relationships fall through the cracks. Model investment in external relationships through your own behaviour. Include external relationship health in periodic team discussions. When workload increases, resist the temptation to deprioritise external relationship maintenance—this is when strong relationships matter most.

Connection to other IDGs: These scaffolds support Empathy and Compassion (knowing people enables caring about them), Integrity and Authenticity (deeper relationships require

genuine interaction), Presence (relationship-building requires being present with others), and Connectedness (relationships are how we experience our belonging to larger wholes).

7.2 Inclusive mindset and intercultural competence — Ensuring all voices contribute

What it means as a collective capability

At the individual level, inclusive mindset and intercultural competence mean willingness and competence to embrace diversity and include people and communities with different perspectives and backgrounds. At the team level, this becomes collective inclusion capability—the team’s capacity to genuinely welcome and integrate diverse perspectives, ensure all members can contribute fully, work effectively across cultural differences, and engage inclusively with those beyond the team’s boundaries.

Many teams have formal diversity but lack genuine inclusion. People with different backgrounds are present, but their perspectives are marginalised. Certain voices dominate while others remain silent. Cultural differences create friction rather than richness. These patterns can also characterise how teams engage with external actors—stakeholders may be consulted but not genuinely heard, partners may be involved but not given real influence.

Developing collective inclusion capability means creating conditions where diverse perspectives genuinely shape the team’s work—whether those perspectives come from within the team or from external collaborators, stakeholders, and communities.

Scaffolds

Scaffold 1: Active inclusion practices in meetings and discussions

Purpose: In most group discussions, participation is unequal. Some people talk frequently; others rarely speak. The patterns are often predictable: more senior people, people from dominant cultural backgrounds, extroverts, and those who speak the working language fluently tend to dominate. Active inclusion practices counteract these patterns to ensure diverse perspectives are heard.

Format: Multiple techniques can increase participation breadth. Round-robin contributions give everyone a turn to speak, preventing a few voices from dominating. Written input before or during discussion allows quieter people to contribute thoughts they might not voice. Small-group discussions before plenary sessions give more people opportunity to formulate and express ideas. Direct invitation to contribute addresses specific individuals who have not spoken, making clear their input is valued. Anonymous input mechanisms remove social dynamics from contribution, allowing ideas to be considered on merit.

When external participants are present—stakeholders in a planning session, partners in a co-creation workshop, community members in a consultation—inclusion practices become even more important. External participants often feel less entitled to speak, may be unfamiliar with the team’s norms, and may hold less organisational power. Active facilitation is needed to create space for their genuine participation.

The choice of techniques should fit the situation and the participants. The goal is not to force everyone to speak but to create conditions where everyone can contribute if they have something to offer. Notice whose perspectives are systematically missing and consider what might help include them.

Team leader role: Pay attention to participation patterns. Notice who speaks and who does not—both within the team and when external participants are present. Use inclusion techniques appropriate to the situation. Address patterns of interruption or dismissal. Create explicit invitation for perspectives that are not being voiced.

Scaffold 2: Addressing cultural differences constructively

Purpose: Teams with members from different cultural backgrounds often experience friction around different expectations, communication styles, or approaches to work. These differences can become sources of misunderstanding and conflict, or they can become resources for learning and complementary strengths. The same applies when teams work across organisational boundaries—different departments, organisations, and sectors have their own cultures that shape expectations and behaviour.

Format: Create explicit opportunities to discuss cultural differences and their implications for working together. This might include sharing about cultural backgrounds, discussing how culture shapes expectations about communication, hierarchy, time, conflict, and other aspects of work, and exploring how the team can accommodate different preferences.

When working across organisational boundaries, attend to organisational and professional culture differences as well. Different departments may have different norms about formality, decision-making speed, risk tolerance, or communication style. Different professions bring different assumptions and values. Different organisations may have quite different cultures even when working in the same sector.

When starting significant cross-boundary collaborations, explicitly discuss working norms. What communication practices will you use? How will decisions be made? What are expectations about response times, meeting attendance, and follow-through? Making these explicit prevents misunderstandings that arise when different parties assume their own norms are shared.

When misunderstandings arise, address them openly rather than allowing resentment to build. Assume good intentions—most cross-cultural friction results from different expectations rather than bad faith. Be willing to examine your own cultural assumptions, not just others’.

Team leader role: Create space for discussing cultural differences without making individuals representatives of their cultures. Model curiosity about different perspectives. Address cross-cultural friction directly and constructively. Be aware of your own cultural assumptions and how they shape team norms. When working across boundaries, invest in understanding the cultural context of your collaborators.

Scaffold 3: Ensuring diverse perspectives shape decisions

Purpose: Inclusion is not merely about participation but about influence. People can participate in discussions yet have no impact on outcomes. Genuine inclusion means diverse perspectives actually shape decisions—whether those perspectives come from within the team or from external stakeholders and partners.

Format: Examine how decisions actually get made. Who has voice in significant choices? Whose perspectives are taken seriously versus tolerated and then ignored? Are there patterns in whose input shapes outcomes? Make decision processes explicit and transparent. When a decision is made, can the team trace how different perspectives influenced it? If diverse input consistently disappears, the process is not genuinely inclusive regardless of how participatory it appears.

This examination should include how the team handles input from external sources. When stakeholders are consulted, does their input genuinely influence outcomes, or is consultation a formality before implementing a predetermined plan? When partners contribute perspectives, are those perspectives given real weight? It is common for teams to believe they are being inclusive while actually filtering external input through their own frames until it becomes indistinguishable from what they would have concluded anyway.

Create explicit mechanisms for minority perspectives to influence decisions. This might include requiring that significant objections be addressed (not just overruled), ensuring that decisions affecting particular groups involve those groups meaningfully, or using decision methods that protect against majority steamrolling.

Team leader role: Examine whether diverse perspectives actually shape decisions or merely create appearance of consultation. Make decision processes transparent. Ensure minority views receive genuine consideration. Hold yourself accountable for inclusive decision-making, not just inclusive participation. When external input is sought, ensure it genuinely influences outcomes.

Scaffold 4: Creating genuinely inclusive engagement with external actors

Purpose: How the team engages with those beyond its boundaries—stakeholders, partners, communities—reflects and shapes its inclusion capability. Teams can replicate exclusionary patterns in their external engagement, privileging some voices while marginalising others, or they can model inclusive practice in how they reach out and collaborate.

Format: When planning engagement with external actors, consider who is being included and who might be left out. Whose voices are typically heard in these processes? Whose are typically absent? Are there stakeholders or community members who are affected by your work but rarely consulted? What barriers might prevent certain groups from participating?

Design engagement processes that reduce barriers to participation. This might mean offering multiple ways to contribute (not just attending meetings), providing information in accessible formats, scheduling at times that work for participants (not just for the team), meeting in locations that are comfortable for participants, or providing support for those who need it to participate effectively.

Attend to power dynamics in external engagement. The team often holds structural power relative to community members, service users, or smaller partner organisations. This power imbalance can make it difficult for less powerful parties to speak candidly or to challenge the team's assumptions. Creating genuinely inclusive engagement requires actively working to mitigate these imbalances.

Team leader role: Champion inclusive external engagement as a team value. When planning engagement, ask whose voices are missing and how they might be included. Model respectful engagement with external actors regardless of their formal status. Ensure that feedback from engagement processes is genuinely considered, not filed and forgotten.

Connection to other IDGs: These scaffolds support Perspective Skills (inclusion enables access to diverse viewpoints), Humility (inclusion requires valuing others' perspectives), Co-Creation Skills (genuine co-creation requires diverse contributions), and Connectedness (inclusive engagement strengthens the team's relationships with its broader context).

7.3 Co-creation skills — Creating together rather than merely coordinating

What it means as a collective capability

At the individual level, co-creation skills mean facilitating collaborative processes with diverse stakeholders, fostering teamwork and psychological safety, and being aware of power dynamics. At the team level, this becomes collective co-creation capability—the team’s capacity to genuinely create together rather than merely dividing work and reassembling outputs, producing outcomes that emerge from collaboration rather than aggregation.

Many teams divide work into individual tasks, then combine the outputs. This is coordination, not co-creation. Genuine co-creation involves working on things together—thinking together, building on each other’s ideas, creating something that could not have emerged from any individual working alone. This requires both opportunity and capability: time and space for collaborative work, and the skills to make that collaboration generative rather than frustrating.

Co-creation capability extends beyond the team’s internal work. Teams increasingly need to co-create with external partners, stakeholders, and communities—developing strategies together, designing solutions collaboratively, or producing shared outputs. This cross-boundary co-creation involves additional challenges: different organisational contexts, unfamiliar working relationships, and often significant power differences between participants. Developing capability for external co-creation requires attention to these distinct challenges.

Scaffolds

Scaffold 1: Collaborative working sessions

Purpose: Most team meetings are for coordination, updates, or decisions—not for collaborative work. Teams that want to develop co-creation capability need dedicated time for actually creating together: generating ideas, solving problems, developing strategies, or producing deliverables as a collective.

Format: Create working sessions specifically designed for collaborative creation. These are different from meetings—the goal is not to discuss or decide but to make something together. The session should have a clear creative objective: develop a plan, solve a problem, generate ideas, produce a draft. Structure should support collaboration: sufficient time (rushed sessions prevent deep engagement), appropriate facilitation (to keep the process productive), and tools for collaborative work (whiteboards, shared documents, collaborative platforms).

Design for genuine contribution from multiple participants. If one person could do it alone, there is no need for collaborative session. If the outcome is predetermined and the session is performance, participants will disengage. The value of collaborative sessions comes from integrating diverse contributions into something none could create alone.

When co-creating with external participants—partners, stakeholders, or community members—additional considerations apply. External participants may be unfamiliar with the team’s working style and norms. They may feel less entitled to contribute or less confident that their input matters. The session design needs to actively create conditions for their genuine participation. This often means: simpler and more explicit processes, more frequent check-ins about whether the process is working for everyone, deliberate invitation of external perspectives, and attention to whether the team’s members are dominating.

Team leader role: Create regular opportunities for collaborative work, not just coordination. Ensure sessions are designed for genuine co-creation. Participate as contributor rather than con-

troller. Protect collaborative time from being squeezed by other demands. When external participants are involved, ensure they have what they need to contribute authentically.

Scaffold 2: Facilitation for generative collaboration

Purpose: Collaborative work can easily become unproductive: dominated by a few voices, stuck in circular discussions, or unable to move from divergent ideas toward useful convergence. Skilled facilitation helps collaborative sessions be generative rather than frustrating—and this skill becomes even more important when collaboration crosses organisational boundaries.

Format: Develop facilitation capability within the team. This might involve designating certain team members as facilitators for collaborative sessions, developing facilitation skills broadly across the team, or bringing in external facilitation for particularly important or difficult sessions.

Key facilitation skills include: structuring the process so that all can contribute; managing the balance between divergence (generating options) and convergence (reaching conclusions); keeping the group on track without controlling the content; handling disagreement constructively; ensuring the session produces clear outcomes; and creating psychological safety for all participants, including those from outside the team.

When facilitating cross-boundary collaboration, additional skills matter. Facilitators need to: create space for participants who may be less familiar with the process or less confident in the setting; translate between different organisational or professional cultures; manage power dynamics that may inhibit some participants; ensure that the team's internal norms do not inadvertently exclude external contributors; and check periodically whether the process is working for all participants.

Facilitation roles can rotate within the team, building capability across the team. It is often useful for the team leader not to facilitate—the roles of leader and facilitator can conflict, and it may be easier for others to participate fully when the leader is not controlling the process. For significant cross-boundary collaborations, consider whether an external or neutral facilitator might help create conditions where all parties can engage more freely.

Team leader role: Invest in facilitation capability for the team. Consider when to facilitate yourself and when to have others facilitate. When others facilitate, participate as team member rather than shadow-leading. Support facilitators and help the team learn from collaborative sessions. For important external collaborations, consider whether external facilitation might be valuable.

Scaffold 3: Analysing and addressing power dynamics in collaboration

Purpose: Power dynamics inevitably shape collaboration. People with more power—formal authority, expertise, social status, verbal confidence—tend to have more influence regardless of the quality of their ideas. Unexamined power dynamics can make “collaboration” into disguised hierarchy where outcomes are predetermined by who has power rather than by the quality of contributions. This is true within teams and becomes even more significant when collaboration crosses organisational boundaries.

Format: Develop the team's capability to recognise and address power dynamics through a structured approach.

Before significant collaborative work (especially with external partners), map the power landscape:

Formal power: Who has organisational authority? Who controls resources, decisions, or access? How do reporting relationships and organisational hierarchies affect who can speak freely?

Expertise and information: Who is seen as having relevant expertise? Who has information others lack? Whose knowledge is treated as authoritative? Whose knowledge might be undervalued?

Social and cultural capital: Who is comfortable in this setting? Who has established relationships and credibility? Whose communication style is treated as “normal”? Who might feel like an outsider?

Stakes and vulnerability: Who has most to lose from this process? Who depends on whom? Whose position is most secure or most precarious?

Having mapped power dynamics, consider how to mitigate problematic imbalances. Practices that can help include: having more powerful parties speak last, so others are not anchored to their views; using structures that enable contribution independent of power position (written input, small groups, anonymous contributions); creating explicit permission to disagree with anyone, including those with more power; providing support for less powerful participants to prepare and contribute; ensuring that less powerful parties have genuine ability to influence outcomes, not just to participate; and naming power dynamics openly when they are affecting the process.

For ongoing collaborations, periodically review: Is everyone able to contribute authentically? Are some voices systematically more influential than others? Are power dynamics distorting outcomes?

Team leader role: Recognise that your position shapes dynamics whether you intend it or not. Practice restraint—hold your views until others have contributed. Explicitly invite disagreement and respond well when it comes. When you notice power dynamics suppressing contributions, name it and adjust the process. Before significant cross-boundary collaborations, lead or commission power analysis and plan how to address problematic dynamics.

Scaffold 4: Building capability for co-creation with external actors

Purpose: Co-creating with external actors—partners, stakeholders, communities—involves challenges beyond internal collaboration. External participants come from different contexts, may have different interests, often have less power relative to the team, and may be unfamiliar with how the team works. Developing genuine co-creation capability with external actors requires deliberate attention to these challenges.

Format: Before significant external co-creation, clarify the nature of the collaboration. Is this genuinely shared creation, where all parties have real influence over outcomes? Or is it consultation, where the team will ultimately decide? Both can be legitimate, but conflating them damages trust. Be honest about what kind of engagement this is.

Design co-creation processes that external participants can engage with authentically. This means: explaining processes clearly rather than assuming familiarity; using language that does not require insider knowledge; creating multiple ways to contribute that suit different styles and capacities; allowing adequate time for those less familiar with the content or process; and checking in regularly about whether the process is working for all participants.

Guard against common failure modes in external co-creation:

Extractive engagement: using collaborative processes to extract ideas or legitimacy from external actors without genuine reciprocity or shared benefit.

Tokenistic participation: including external actors for appearance but not giving them genuine influence over outcomes.

Frame imposition: inviting external input but filtering it through the team's existing assumptions until it becomes indistinguishable from what the team would have concluded anyway.

Collaboration capture: allowing the most powerful or vocal external participants to dominate, so that "external input" actually represents only some external perspectives.

Build relationships that enable ongoing co-creation. One-off collaborative events rarely produce the trust and mutual understanding needed for genuine co-creation. Where sustained external collaboration matters, invest in ongoing relationships that allow shared understanding to develop over time.

Team leader role: Champion genuine co-creation with external actors as distinct from consultation or information-gathering. Before significant external collaboration, ensure clarity about what kind of engagement this is. Monitor for failure modes like extraction or tokenism. Invest in relationships that enable sustained co-creation. After external collaboration, assess honestly whether external participants had genuine influence.

Connection to other IDGs: These scaffolds support Creativity (collaborative sessions can generate ideas no individual would produce), Perspective Skills (co-creation integrates diverse viewpoints), Systems Thinking (working together reveals connections individuals miss), Humility (genuine co-creation requires not needing to dominate), and Inclusive Mindset (co-creation capability enables meaningful inclusion of external voices).

7.4 Communication skills — Creating shared understanding

What it means as a collective capability

At the individual level, communication skills mean the ability to listen deeply, foster genuine dialogue, advocate one's views skillfully, manage conflicts constructively, and adapt communication to diverse groups. At the team level, this becomes collective communication capability—the team's ability to share information effectively, engage in productive dialogue, work through disagreements constructively, and communicate well across boundaries with external audiences.

Communication is the medium through which teams function. When communication works well, information flows, understanding develops, disagreements clarify rather than divide, and the team coordinates effectively. When communication fails, misunderstanding proliferates, conflicts escalate, information gets trapped, and coordination breaks down.

Communication across boundaries presents additional challenges. Other teams, external partners, and stakeholders may have different communication norms, use different terminology, or operate with different assumptions. Developing collective communication capability means building team patterns that support effective exchange both internally and across these boundaries.

Scaffolds

Scaffold 1: Norms for effective information sharing

Purpose: Teams need information to function, but information flow is often inadequate. People hoard information, forget to share, communicate to some but not others, or share in ways that do not reach those who need to know. Establishing clear norms for information sharing helps ensure that relevant information reaches the people who need it—both within the team and across its boundaries.

Format: Establish explicit agreements about information sharing: what information should be shared, with whom, through what channels, and with what timeliness. Common elements include: default to transparency (share unless there is reason not to), proactive communication (share information people need before they have to ask), use of shared platforms rather than private channels for team-relevant information, and timely updates when situations change.

Clarify which channels to use for what purposes. When should people use email versus chat versus shared documents versus meetings? Confusion about channels leads to information getting lost or duplicated.

Extend these norms to cross-boundary communication. Which information should be shared with other teams or external partners? Who is responsible for keeping key external collaborators informed? What communication rhythms will you maintain with important external relationships?

Periodically assess whether information is flowing as needed, both internally and across boundaries. Are people getting what they need? Are there bottlenecks or black holes where information disappears?

Team leader role: Model good information sharing practices. Establish and maintain clear norms. Create and protect appropriate channels. Address patterns of poor information flow. Ensure that cross-boundary communication does not fall through the cracks when workload increases.

Scaffold 2: Practices for genuine dialogue

Purpose: Much team communication is transactional: exchanging information, coordinating tasks, making decisions. Dialogue is different—it is exploratory conversation aimed at developing shared understanding, often about complex or contested topics. Teams that can engage in genuine dialogue develop better understanding and make better decisions than teams limited to transactional exchange. The capacity for genuine dialogue also enables more effective communication across boundaries, where different assumptions and perspectives need to be explored rather than simply negotiated.

Format: Creating space for genuine dialogue requires both structural conditions and conversational practices.

Structural conditions include: protected time (dialogue cannot be rushed—allow 45-90 minutes for substantive topics); appropriate setting (minimize interruptions, arrange seating to enable eye contact and equal participation); clarity about purpose (this is exploration, not decision-making—the goal is understanding, not conclusion); and explicit norms (what follows should be agreed and visible to participants).

Conversational practices for dialogue differ from those for debate or discussion:

Listening to understand: The goal of listening is to genuinely understand what the other person means, not to prepare your rebuttal. Indicators: you can summarise their view in a way they would accept; you can articulate what they see that you might be missing; you feel curious rather than defensive.

Suspending certainty: Hold your own views lightly enough to genuinely consider alternatives. This does not mean abandoning your perspective, but being willing to discover that you are wrong or that the situation is more complex than you thought. Indicators: you can articulate the limitations of your own view; you change your mind or discover something new.

Exploring rather than advocating: Share your thinking-in-progress, not just your conclusions. Explain your reasoning and the experiences that shaped your view. Invite others to probe and question. Indicators: you share uncertainty and questions, not just positions; others can understand how you came to your view.

Building on contributions: Take what others offer seriously. Look for what is valuable in their perspective before identifying limitations. Make connections between different contributions. Indicators: ideas develop through the conversation; the ending point differs from anyone's starting point.

Welcoming difference: Treat different perspectives as resources for learning rather than obstacles to agreement. Be curious about why others see things differently. Indicators: disagreement generates exploration rather than conflict; minority views are actively solicited.

Facilitation guidance for dialogue:

Opening: Set context clearly—why this dialogue, what is the purpose, what question or topic. Explain the norms (listening, suspending certainty, exploring, building). Consider a moment of silence or brief individual reflection before speaking begins.

During: Watch for departures from dialogue norms (debating rather than exploring, advocacy without inquiry, listening only to respond). Intervene gently to restore dialogue quality. Ensure broad participation—invite quieter voices, ask dominant speakers to hold space. Ask questions that deepen exploration: “What might you be missing?” “What would it take to change your view?” “What is each perspective capturing that the others might miss?”

Closing: Allow time for reflection on what was learned. Note insights, questions that emerged, and shifts in understanding. Be clear about what happens next—dialogue is valuable in itself, but participants should know whether and how it connects to decisions or actions.

When engaging in dialogue across boundaries—with other teams, external partners, or stakeholders—additional attention is needed. Different parties may have different dialogue skills or norms. Power differences may make some participants reluctant to speak candidly. Different professional or organisational cultures may shape what people feel comfortable saying. Facilitation needs to actively create safety and space for all participants.

Team leader role: Create regular opportunities for dialogue—time and setting where exploratory conversation can happen. Model dialogic practices: listen genuinely, ask questions, explore rather than conclude prematurely. Distinguish dialogue from discussion and debate—help the team understand when each is appropriate. Protect dialogue time from being hijacked by decision-making pressure. When facilitating, prioritise dialogue quality over efficiency.

Scaffold 3: Constructive disagreement practices

Purpose: Disagreement is inevitable in teams, and it can be productive or destructive. Suppressed disagreement leads to poor decisions as problems are not surfaced. Destructive disagreement damages relationships and impedes progress. Constructive disagreement—where different views are expressed, examined, and resolved or integrated—improves decisions and strengthens relationships.

Format: Establish norms that make disagreement safe and productive:

Focus on issues rather than people—critique ideas, not individuals. Assume good intentions—people who disagree are usually trying to help, not obstruct. Seek to understand before seeking to be understood—explore the other perspective fully before defending your own. Look for legitimate concerns in opposing views—rarely is one side entirely right and the other entirely wrong. Aim for resolution that addresses underlying concerns rather than simple compromise or winner-take-all.

When disagreements become heated, slow down. Take breaks if needed. Return to exploring underlying interests rather than arguing positions. If disagreement cannot be resolved, determine how the team will proceed—sometimes decisions must be made despite disagreement, but this should be explicit and those who disagreed should be able to voice their concerns.

When disagreement occurs across boundaries—with other teams, external partners, or stakeholders—additional care is needed. Power differences may make it risky for some parties to disagree openly. Different cultures may have different norms about expressing disagreement. The absence of ongoing relationship may make disagreement feel more threatening. Create conditions that make cross-boundary disagreement safe and productive, even when the parties do not know each other well.

Team leader role: Model constructive disagreement—disagree openly but respectfully. Create norms that make disagreement safe. Intervene when disagreement becomes personal or destructive. Help the team work through disagreements to productive resolution. In cross-boundary settings, actively create safety for disagreement and ensure that power differences do not suppress important dissent.

Scaffold 4: Communication across organisational and cultural boundaries

Purpose: Teams communicate across boundaries constantly—with other teams, with stakeholders, with external partners. Effective cross-boundary communication requires attention to the different contexts, norms, and needs of those beyond the team.

Format: Develop awareness of how communication norms differ across boundaries. Different teams, departments, and organisations may have different expectations about: formality and tone, response times and communication frequency, preferred channels and formats, directness versus indirectness, how disagreement is expressed, and what information should be shared proactively.

When working with regular collaborators, invest in building shared communication practices. Discuss explicitly: What communication approaches work best for both parties? What should we expect from each other? What channels will we use for what purposes? This explicit negotiation prevents misunderstandings that arise when each party assumes their own norms are shared.

Adapt communication for different audiences while maintaining authenticity. The same message may need to be framed differently for different recipients—not to deceive, but to communicate effectively given their context and concerns. Consider what the recipient needs to know, what context they have, what concerns they might have, and what language and framing will resonate with them.

Build the team’s capability to communicate effectively across cultural boundaries. This includes both national/ethnic cultural differences and professional/organisational cultural differences. Develop awareness of how communication styles vary across cultures. Practice adapting communication without stereotyping individuals based on cultural background.

Team leader role: Model effective cross-boundary communication in your own interactions. When starting significant cross-boundary collaborations, initiate explicit discussion of communication practices. Support team members in developing cross-boundary communication skills. When communication breakdowns occur across boundaries, address them directly rather than allowing frustration to build.

Connection to other IDGs: These scaffolds support Systems Thinking (information flow reveals system connections), Openness and Learning Mindset (dialogue requires openness to others’ perspectives), Presence (genuine dialogue requires being fully present), Courage (constructive disagreement requires courage to voice dissent), and Inclusive Mindset (effective cross-boundary communication enables genuine inclusion).

7.5 Mobilisation skills — Engaging others in shared purpose

What it means as a collective capability

At the individual level, mobilisation skills mean inspiring and enabling others to engage in shared purposes and collective action. At the team level, this becomes collective mobilisation capability—the team’s ability to engage others beyond itself in shared work, building commitment, coordinating with external partners, and activating collective effort toward common goals.

Teams rarely work in isolation. They depend on and interact with other teams, stakeholders, partners, and external audiences. The team’s ability to engage these others—to build commitment to shared purposes, coordinate effectively across boundaries, and mobilise collective action—often determines whether the team’s work has impact beyond its immediate activities.

Scaffolds

Scaffold 1: Stakeholder engagement practices

Purpose: Effective engagement with stakeholders—those who have interest in or are affected by the team’s work—is essential for most teams. Stakeholder engagement builds support, surfaces important perspectives, creates allies, and enables coordination. Teams that engage stakeholders well accomplish more than teams that work in isolation.

Format: Develop systematic approaches to stakeholder engagement.

Identify key stakeholders—who has interest in or influence over the team’s work? What do they need? What can they contribute? Different stakeholders require different engagement approaches: some need regular updates, some need to be consulted on decisions, some need opportunities to contribute, some need assurance that their interests are being considered.

Plan engagement—what relationships need to be built or maintained? How will you engage different stakeholders? Who is responsible for which relationships? Match engagement intensity to stakeholder importance and interest.

Execute and maintain engagement—stakeholder relationships require ongoing attention, not just initial outreach. Regular communication, responsiveness to concerns, and follow-through on commitments build the relationships that enable mobilisation. When workload increases, resist the temptation to let stakeholder engagement slip—this is when good relationships are most valuable.

Move beyond transactional engagement where appropriate. With some stakeholders, the relationship can be deeper than exchange of information and influence. Consider where genuine partnership might be possible—shared goals, joint work, mutual support. These deeper relationships create more durable commitment than transactional engagement.

Assign clear responsibility for stakeholder relationships. Without clarity, stakeholder engagement falls through the cracks or becomes haphazard. Consider whether relationships should be concentrated (one person manages key relationships) or distributed (different team members engage different stakeholders), based on stakeholder needs and team capacity.

Team leader role: Prioritise stakeholder engagement as ongoing work, not occasional outreach. Ensure clarity about who is responsible for which relationships. Model effective engagement in your own stakeholder relationships. Support team members in their engagement efforts. Review stakeholder relationship health periodically.

Scaffold 2: Articulating and co-developing shared purpose

Purpose: Mobilisation requires compelling purpose that others can connect to. Teams that can articulate why their work matters—in ways that resonate with different audiences—are better able to build commitment, attract support, and coordinate collective action. But purpose becomes even more powerful when it is co-developed with those the team seeks to mobilise, rather than simply communicated to them.

Format: Develop clear articulation of the team’s purpose: what you are trying to accomplish, why it matters, and what difference it will make. This should be concrete enough to guide action and compelling enough to inspire engagement.

Adapt communication for different audiences—what resonates with senior leadership may differ from what motivates frontline colleagues, which may differ from what engages external partners. The core purpose remains the same, but framing and emphasis can be adapted to connect with different audiences’ concerns and values.

Use multiple channels and formats to communicate purpose. Written statements, presentations, conversations, stories, and examples all play roles. Repetition is necessary—purpose must be communicated consistently over time to build and maintain shared understanding and commitment.

Where sustained collaboration is needed, move beyond communicating purpose to co-developing it. Invite partners and stakeholders to shape the shared purpose rather than only hearing about it. When people contribute to defining purpose, they are more committed to pursuing it. This does not mean abandoning the team’s own sense of purpose, but finding shared purpose that genuinely reflects what all parties care about.

Co-developed purpose emerges through dialogue, not pronouncement. Create space for exploring what matters to different parties, what they hope to accomplish, what success would look like for them. Look for genuine overlap and shared aspiration, not just negotiated compromise. Shared purpose that feels authentic to all parties is more durable than purpose that some parties feel was imposed.

Team leader role: Lead development of clear purpose articulation. Model communication of purpose in your own interactions. Support team members in communicating purpose effectively. Where sustained collaboration is important, initiate processes for co-developing shared purpose with key partners. Ensure consistent messaging across the team while allowing appropriate adaptation for different audiences.

Scaffold 3: Coordination across team boundaries

Purpose: Most significant work requires coordination across team boundaries. The team's work connects to other teams, functions, or organisations. Effective cross-boundary coordination multiplies the team's impact; poor coordination creates friction, duplication, and missed opportunities.

Format: Identify where cross-boundary coordination is needed: which other teams, functions, or organisations does your work connect to? What needs to be coordinated—timing, handoffs, shared resources, joint decisions?

Establish coordination mechanisms appropriate to the need. For closely interdependent work: regular coordination meetings, shared planning processes, joint working sessions, or embedded liaison roles. For looser coordination: periodic check-ins, shared information systems, clear handoff protocols. For formal partnerships: explicit agreements about roles, responsibilities, and decision-making.

Build relationships that enable coordination—coordination works better when people know each other and have established trust. Invest in relationships with key counterparts in other teams and organisations. These relationships provide the informal channels that make formal coordination mechanisms work.

Create shared accountability where appropriate. For truly joint work, consider how to create shared ownership of outcomes rather than each party being accountable only for their piece. Shared accountability can be created through joint goals, shared metrics, combined retrospectives, or explicit mutual commitments.

Address coordination failures directly. When handoffs fail, when work is duplicated, when partners are surprised, examine what went wrong and how coordination can improve. These failures are often systemic—addressing root causes prevents recurrence.

Team leader role: Prioritise cross-boundary coordination as essential work. Build and maintain relationships with peer leaders. Establish and protect coordination mechanisms. Address coordination failures constructively. Represent the team well to external partners while also representing their perspectives to the team.

Connection to other IDGs: These scaffolds support Systems Thinking (cross-boundary coordination requires seeing system connections), Connectedness (mobilisation builds awareness of interdependence and belonging to larger wholes), Relationship-Building Skills (mobilisation depends on relationships), Proactivity (good coordination requires initiative), and Inner Compass (shared purpose connects to core values).

Summary: The Collaborating dimension

The scaffolds in this section address how the team works together and with others. They help teams build strong working relationships both internally and across boundaries, genuinely include diverse perspectives from within and beyond the team, create together rather than merely divide work, communicate effectively across differences, and engage others in shared purpose. These collaborative capabilities transform groups of individuals into teams capable of collective achievement—and extend the team’s capacity to work effectively with the many others its work connects to.

Effective collaboration does not happen automatically, even among skilled and well-intentioned people. It requires deliberate investment in relationships, active practices of inclusion, structured approaches to co-creation, attention to communication quality, and systematic engagement with external stakeholders. Without this deliberate work, teams default to patterns that limit their collective potential: superficial relationships, exclusion of diverse voices, parallel work rather than genuine collaboration, communication failures, and isolation from potential partners.

The external dimension of collaboration deserves particular emphasis. Teams can become so focused on internal functioning that they neglect the relationships and capabilities needed to work effectively across boundaries. Yet for most teams, their impact depends significantly on these external collaborations—with other teams, with stakeholders, with partners, with communities. Building capability for external collaboration is not an afterthought to internal team development; it is an essential component of the team’s overall effectiveness.

Start with the scaffolds that address your team’s most significant collaboration gaps. A team with weak internal relationships might focus on relationship-building practices. A team that struggles with inclusion might prioritise active inclusion scaffolds. A team that divides work but never truly creates together might experiment with collaborative working sessions. A team with communication problems might focus on dialogue and disagreement practices. A team working in isolation might develop mobilisation and external engagement capability. Whatever your starting point, the aim is to build collaborative capability that enables the team to achieve together what no member could accomplish alone—and to engage effectively with the wider world its work is part of.

When scaffolds for the Collaborating dimension aren’t taking hold

If you’ve tried scaffolds for Collaborating capabilities and they’re not working, consider:

Check the foundation: Collaboration scaffolds require both relationships (trust, psychological safety) and clarity about what is being created together. If either is missing, collaboration practices will not produce genuine co-creation.

Check for hidden constraints: What makes it difficult for collaboration to develop? Is the work actually divisible into independent tasks, making collaboration unnecessary? Do performance systems reward individual rather than collective achievement? Are there such different perspectives that finding common ground feels impossible? Is there insufficient time for the iterative process collaboration requires? Are power dynamics so imbalanced that genuine collaboration is blocked?

Consider the external dimension: If internal collaboration is working but external collaboration struggles, the issues may be different. External relationships may need more deliberate investment. Cross-boundary coordination may need more explicit mechanisms. Power dyna-

mics with external partners may need to be addressed. The team's culture may inadvertently exclude external participants.

Try a different entry point: The suggested scaffolds are not the only way to develop Collaborating capabilities. If formal practices are not working, collaboration might develop through: working together on urgent problems where collaboration is obviously necessary; starting with pairs or small groups before attempting whole-team collaboration; focusing on process skills (listening, building on ideas) before tackling important content; creating shared ownership of outcomes that require genuine joint effort; or building external relationships informally before attempting formal collaboration.

Accept current limits: Sometimes the work does not actually require deep collaboration, or the team is not ready for it. It may be more productive to: accept coordination rather than collaboration for now; build collaborative capability on lower-stakes projects before attempting critical work; consider whether the team composition supports collaboration; focus on other capabilities that might enable collaboration later; or accept that collaboration with certain external parties may not be feasible at present and focus on relationships that can be developed.

8. Acting — Leading and enabling change

The Acting dimension addresses how a team moves from understanding and intention to concrete action that creates change. At the individual level, Acting encompasses courage, hope and optimism, conscious use of resources, proactivity, and resilience. At the team level, these become collective capabilities for taking bold action despite uncertainty, maintaining shared belief in what is possible, using resources wisely and responsibly, taking initiative toward important goals, and persisting through difficulty and setback.

Teams that develop collective capability in the Acting dimension turn intentions into results. They take action even when conditions are uncertain and outcomes cannot be guaranteed. They maintain energy and commitment over time, including through periods when progress is slow or invisible. They attend to the consequences of their resource use—not only for team effectiveness but for the environment and climate. They do not wait for permission or perfect conditions but take initiative toward what matters. They persist through obstacles and recover from setbacks.

These capabilities matter because understanding and good intentions are not enough. Many teams can analyse situations, develop plans, and articulate what should happen—but then fail to act, or act briefly and then lose momentum, or exhaust themselves through unsustainable effort. The scaffolds in this section help teams build the action capabilities that translate vision into reality and sustain effort over the long timeframes that significant change requires.

The Acting dimension takes on particular significance in a time of climate crisis, ecological degradation, and political instability. Teams working toward the SDGs and similar long-term goals face not only the practical challenges of creating change but also the psychological challenge of sustaining meaningful action when the scale of problems can feel overwhelming and when progress is often slow or hard to see. Hope and resilience become not merely helpful qualities but essential capacities for teams that want to contribute to addressing the urgent challenges facing humanity and the living Earth. Conscious use of resources becomes not merely about team efficiency but about the team's responsibility for environmental consequences of its activities and the solutions it produces. The scaffolds in this chapter address both the practical and psychological dimensions of sustained, responsible action.

8.1 Courage — Taking bold action despite uncertainty

What it means as a collective capability

At the individual level, courage means standing up for fundamental values, making decisions, taking action, and when needed, questioning and disrupting established structures and views. At the team level, this becomes collective courage—the team's capacity to take bold action despite uncertainty, to voice difficult truths, to challenge problematic patterns, and to persist with principled action even when facing resistance or risk.

Teams vary in their collective courage. Some teams play it safe, avoiding anything controversial, sticking to established patterns, and retreating from any significant risk. Other teams demonstrate collective boldness—they raise difficult issues, challenge problematic decisions, take calculated risks, and stand by their principles even when it would be easier not to. This collective courage is more than the sum of individual bravery; it emerges from team culture and practices that make courageous action possible and supported.

Courage is particularly needed when advocating for sustainability, long-term thinking, or social responsibility in contexts where short-term pressures dominate. Teams that can speak up for

environmental considerations, challenge unsustainable practices, and persist with principled positions even when facing resistance contribute not only to their organisation's integrity but to the broader shifts that addressing global challenges requires.

Scaffolds

Scaffold 1: Creating permission for courageous voice

Purpose: One of the most common failures of courage in teams is silence—not raising concerns, not voicing disagreement, not pointing out problems that everyone can see but no one will name. Creating explicit permission and expectation for courageous voice makes it easier for team members to speak up when it matters.

Format: Establish explicit norms that speaking up about concerns is expected, not just permitted. Make clear that raising difficult issues is a contribution to the team, not a problem. Create specific practices that invite courageous voice: regular opportunities to surface concerns, explicit questions about what is not being said, and invitation for dissenting views before decisions are finalised.

When people do speak up courageously, respond well. Thank them for raising the issue. Take their concerns seriously. Never punish honesty, even when the message is unwelcome. How the team responds to courageous voice determines whether it will happen again. One dismissive or punitive response can silence a team for a long time.

Team leader role: Model courageous voice yourself—raise difficult issues, acknowledge problems, voice concerns upward. Create explicit permission for others to speak up. Respond constructively when they do. Never punish honesty. Actively invite dissent and concerns, especially before important decisions.

Scaffold 2: Calculated risk-taking practices

Purpose: Significant achievement requires risk. Teams that avoid all risk accomplish little of significance. But reckless risk-taking can be destructive. Collective courage involves calculated risk-taking—being willing to take risks that are proportionate to potential benefits, informed by clear analysis, and bounded to limit downside consequences.

Format: Develop team practices for evaluating and taking risks. When considering a bold action, explicitly assess: What could go wrong? How likely are different outcomes? What is the potential upside? What is the worst-case downside, and can we accept it? How can we bound the risk to limit potential damage? This analysis should inform decisions without becoming excuse for paralysis—the goal is informed courage, not endless analysis that avoids action.

Create permission for bounded experiments. When the team is uncertain whether something will work, consider whether it can be tried on a small scale before full commitment. This makes risk-taking easier by limiting potential damage while still enabling learning and progress.

Team leader role: Model calculated risk-taking—take risks yourself while being transparent about your reasoning. Support team members who take informed risks, including when those risks do not pay off. Create space for bounded experiments. Distinguish between good risks that did not work out and reckless risks that should have been avoided.

Scaffold 3: Standing firm on principles under pressure

Purpose: Teams regularly face pressure to compromise their principles—pressure to cut corners, to go along with problematic decisions, to prioritise short-term convenience over long-term values. This includes pressure to compromise on environmental and social responsibility commitments when they conflict with cost or speed. Collective courage means maintaining principled action even under pressure, standing firm when it would be easier to yield.

Format: Clarify in advance what principles the team will not compromise, including commitments regarding environmental responsibility, ethical conduct, and social impact. When principles are clear before pressure arrives, it is easier to stand firm. Vague values provide little guidance under pressure; specific principles provide foundation for action.

When pressure to compromise arrives, name it explicitly. Acknowledge that standing firm may have costs. Discuss as a team whether this is a situation where principles apply and what standing firm will require. Make the decision collectively when possible—collective commitment is easier to maintain than individual resistance.

Support team members who face pressure individually. When someone is being pressured to compromise, the team should back them up rather than leaving them isolated. Collective courage means acting together, not leaving individuals to bear the cost of principled action alone.

Team leader role: Lead clarification of team principles, including sustainability and social responsibility commitments. Model standing firm under pressure. Support team members who face pressure to compromise. Take responsibility for principled stands rather than leaving individuals exposed. When necessary, escalate or absorb pressure to protect the team's ability to act with integrity.

Connection to other IDGs: These scaffolds support Inner Compass (standing firm expresses core values), Integrity and Authenticity (principled action is integrity in practice), Resilience (maintaining principles through difficulty requires resilience), and Connectedness (standing firm on environmental principles reflects care for larger wholes).

8.2 Hope and optimism — Maintaining belief in what is possible

What it means as a collective capability

At the individual level, hope and optimism mean building and sustaining a shared belief in our capacity to create a more just, inclusive, and sustainable future. At the team level, this becomes collective hope—the team's capacity to maintain belief that meaningful progress is possible, to sustain energy and commitment through difficulty, and to generate the positive engagement that enables sustained effort.

Teams need hope to sustain action. When people believe their efforts are futile, engagement collapses. When teams believe meaningful progress is possible, they persist through difficulty and setback. This is not naive positivity that ignores problems but grounded hope that acknowledges challenges while maintaining belief in the possibility of progress. Collective hope is contagious—it spreads through teams and can spread to others the team works with.

Maintaining hope takes on particular significance in a time of climate crisis, ecological degradation, and political instability. Teams working in awareness of these global challenges—whether directly on sustainability issues or in any sector affected by these larger realities—face the risk of despair, cynicism, and burnout. The scale of problems can feel overwhelming. Pro-

gress often seems painfully slow relative to the urgency of the situation. Setbacks and reversals are frequent. News about climate, biodiversity, and political developments can be deeply discouraging.

In this context, hope is not a luxury or a personality trait but an essential collective capacity that teams need to cultivate deliberately. Grounded hope—hope that does not require denial of difficulty—enables teams to sustain meaningful action even when outcomes are uncertain and the larger context is discouraging. Without such hope, even skilled and committed teams lose momentum, burn out, or retreat into cynicism that protects against disappointment but also prevents engagement.

Scaffolds

Scaffold 1: Celebrating progress and successes

Purpose: Hope is sustained by evidence that progress is possible. Teams that notice and celebrate their progress build the foundation for continued hope. Teams that focus only on what remains to be done, ignoring what has been accomplished, erode their own motivation. This is particularly important when working on challenges where progress can feel inadequate relative to the scale of problems.

Format: Create regular practices for noticing and celebrating progress. This might include beginning meetings by acknowledging recent accomplishments, periodic reviews of what the team has achieved over longer timeframes, explicit celebration of milestones and completions, and sharing of positive feedback from stakeholders or beneficiaries of the team's work.

Be specific about progress—vague statements of encouragement have less impact than concrete recognition of specific accomplishments. Include small successes, not just major achievements—sustained hope comes from accumulating evidence of progress, and small successes count. When working on large-scale challenges, resist the temptation to dismiss small progress as inadequate. Small steps accumulate. Every contribution matters, even when it feels insufficient relative to the scale of need.

Extend attention beyond the team's own progress. Share stories of progress from the broader field—when others working toward similar purposes succeed, that provides evidence that progress is possible. Track developments in the wider movement, not just internal metrics. This broader view helps counter the isolation that can make a team's own efforts feel futile.

When progress is genuinely slow or difficult to see, look harder. Find what is working, what is moving, what has improved. If truly nothing is progressing, that is information the team needs to address—but usually there is progress that is being overlooked.

Team leader role: Make celebrating progress a regular practice. Notice and name accomplishments. Express genuine appreciation for the team's efforts and achievements. Model hope by articulating your own belief in what is possible. Counter excessive pessimism while remaining realistic about challenges. Share stories of progress from beyond the team.

Scaffold 2: Maintaining perspective through difficulty

Purpose: Difficult periods are inevitable. Projects hit obstacles, initiatives fail, external circumstances create setbacks. For teams working in awareness of climate and political crises, the broader context itself can be a source of ongoing difficulty—a steady stream of discouraging news, a sense that problems are accelerating faster than solutions. During these periods, hope is most vulnerable and most needed. Teams that can maintain perspective through difficulty—

neither denying problems nor succumbing to despair—are better able to persist and eventually succeed.

Format: When facing difficulty, create space to acknowledge what is hard without catastrophising. Name the challenges honestly. Allow people to express frustration, disappointment, discouragement, or grief—including grief about environmental destruction, species loss, or political developments. Suppressing difficult emotions does not make them go away; acknowledging them creates possibility for moving through them. Some team members may be experiencing eco-anxiety, climate grief, or despair about the state of the world. Creating space where these feelings can be expressed without judgment is important for team health.

Then actively work to maintain perspective and sustain engagement:

Place current difficulties in broader context. What looked like disaster in the moment often proves manageable in retrospect. Recall past difficulties the team has navigated. Identify what is still working, what resources remain, what possibilities exist.

Focus attention on what can be influenced rather than what cannot be controlled. The scale of global challenges can paralyse if attention stays fixed on the enormity of the problem. Shifting to concrete questions—What can we do? What is our next step? Where can we have impact?—restores agency and enables action.

Adopt solution-focused approaches. Rather than dwelling on everything that is wrong, ask: What would progress look like? What small steps could move in that direction? What is already working that we could build on? What strengths and resources do we have? This is not denial of problems but deliberate attention to possibilities.

Seek out and share evidence of progress. Counter the stream of bad news with deliberate attention to what is improving, what is working, where progress is being made. Progress exists, but it often does not make headlines; finding and sharing it is important work.

Reaffirm the purpose that makes the struggle worthwhile. Connect current difficulty to the larger reasons for the work.

Team leader role: Model realistic hope—acknowledge difficulties while maintaining belief in the team’s ability to navigate them. Create space for people to process difficult emotions, including emotions about larger global situations. Help the team maintain perspective. Remind people of past successes in overcoming obstacles. Focus attention on possibilities and actions rather than despair. Notice if team members are struggling with despair or burnout and provide appropriate support.

Scaffold 3: Connecting to larger purpose and movement

Purpose: Hope is sustained by connection to something larger than immediate circumstances. When teams see their work as part of a larger movement, when they understand their efforts as contributing to purposes that transcend the team itself, hope becomes more robust. The team’s struggles and setbacks are placed in context of larger progress. Isolation is one of the greatest threats to hope; connection to others working toward similar purposes is one of the most powerful antidotes.

Format: Regularly connect the team’s work to larger context. How does what the team does contribute to broader organisational goals? To sector-wide or societal progress? To purposes that extend beyond the team’s immediate scope? How does the work connect to larger move-

ments addressing climate, sustainability, social justice, or other global challenges? Make these connections explicit and vivid rather than abstract.

Share stories of progress in the broader field. When others working toward similar purposes succeed, share that news—it provides evidence that progress is possible and reminds the team that it is not alone. Track positive developments that may not make mainstream news: policy advances, technological breakthroughs, community initiatives, corporate commitments, movement growth. Counter discouraging news with deliberate attention to what is going right.

Connect with others doing related work. Create opportunities for the team to engage with others working toward similar purposes—through conferences, networks, communities of practice, or informal connections. Seeing that the team is part of a larger movement builds hope and reduces the isolation that makes effort feel futile.

Draw on history. Most significant progress has required sustained effort over long periods, often with many setbacks along the way. Understanding current work as part of a longer arc of change provides perspective that sustains hope. The movements that achieved major social changes—abolition of slavery, women’s suffrage, civil rights, environmental protection—all required decades of effort through discouragement and setback. The current generation’s work on climate, sustainability, and social justice is part of this longer story.

Team leader role: Regularly articulate how the team’s work connects to larger purpose and movement. Share stories of progress from the broader field. Create opportunities to connect with others doing related work. Help team members see their contributions as part of something larger than the immediate tasks. Draw on historical examples when helpful.

Connection to other IDGs: These scaffolds support Appreciation (celebrating progress is a form of appreciation), Resilience (recognising progress sustains persistence), Long-Term Orientation (celebrating progress connects daily work to longer-term goals), Connectedness (connection to movement builds sense of belonging to larger wholes), and Inner Compass (connection to purpose sustains commitment to values).

8.3 Conscious use of resources — Responsibility for environmental impact

What it means as a collective capability

At the individual level, conscious use of resources means acting with awareness of the planet’s limited natural resources, prioritising conservation, regeneration, and frugality to avoid harmful consumption. At the team level, this becomes collective resource responsibility—the team’s capacity to attend to the environmental consequences of its activities, to reduce unnecessary consumption and waste, and to consider resource and environmental implications in the work it produces and the solutions it recommends.

This capability extends beyond the team’s internal efficiency. While using time and energy well matters, the distinctive contribution of this IDG lies in the team’s relationship to resources that affect the environment and climate: energy consumption, material use, travel, waste generation, and the resource implications of what the team creates or recommends to others. Teams operate within planetary boundaries, whether or not they attend to this reality. Developing conscious resource use means bringing awareness and responsibility to this dimension of the team’s activities.

Teams often consume resources and generate environmental impact without giving it much thought. Travel choices are made for convenience without considering carbon footprint. Pro-

curement decisions focus on cost and functionality without considering environmental and social dimensions of supply chains. The solutions teams develop may solve immediate problems while contributing to larger environmental problems. Conscious resource use means bringing deliberate attention to these dimensions and making choices that reflect care for the planet, not just immediate convenience.

Scaffolds

Scaffold 1: Examining and reducing the team's environmental footprint

Purpose: Teams cannot reduce what they do not notice. Creating awareness of the team's environmental footprint is the foundation for more responsible resource use. This examination is not about guilt or perfection but about bringing attention and intention to an area that often operates on autopilot.

Format: Periodically (annually or when circumstances change significantly), examine the team's direct environmental footprint. Dimensions to consider include:

Travel: How much does the team travel, and by what modes? What is the carbon footprint of this travel? Which travel is essential, and which could be reduced or replaced with virtual alternatives? When travel is necessary, are lower-impact options used where feasible?

Energy use: What energy does the team consume through its activities? Are there opportunities to reduce energy consumption or shift to renewable sources? This includes both direct use (office energy) and indirect use (energy embedded in purchased goods and services).

Materials and supplies: What materials does the team consume? Where are there opportunities to reduce consumption, choose more sustainable options, or minimise waste? This includes paper, equipment, consumables, and other supplies.

Waste: What waste does the team generate? Where can waste be reduced at source? Where can materials be reused or recycled? Are there waste streams that could be eliminated entirely?

Procurement: When the team purchases goods or services, are environmental and social considerations part of the decision? Do procurement choices reflect the team's values regarding sustainability?

Digital footprint: What is the environmental impact of the team's digital activities? Data storage, computing, and digital communication all have energy implications.

The goal is not to create burden or bureaucracy but to bring awareness to choices that are often made without thought. Once the footprint is visible, the team can identify priority areas for improvement and set realistic goals. Some reductions may be easy; others may be constrained by organisational systems or practical realities. Focus on what can actually be changed.

Team leader role: Lead or commission the footprint examination. Create visibility for environmental impact without creating shame or defensiveness. Help the team identify realistic priorities for improvement. Model conscious choices in your own behaviour. Advocate for organisational changes that would enable better team-level practices.

Scaffold 2: Integrating resource consciousness into the team's work outputs

Purpose: The team's greatest environmental impact may not be its own direct consumption but the consequences of what it produces, recommends, or decides. A team that develops products, creates policies, makes investment decisions, designs processes, or advises others has influence

that extends far beyond its own resource use. Integrating resource consciousness into this work means considering environmental implications as a normal part of analysis and decision-making.

Format: Build habits of asking about resource and environmental implications of the team’s work:

When developing solutions or recommendations: What are the resource and environmental implications of this approach? Are we solving one problem while contributing to others? Are there alternatives that would have lower environmental impact while still meeting the need?

When evaluating options: Are environmental criteria included in how we assess alternatives? Do we consider lifecycle impacts, not just immediate costs? Do we consider resource consumption, waste generation, carbon footprint, and other environmental dimensions?

When making decisions: Have we considered how this decision affects resource use and environmental impact—not just for our team but for others who will be affected? Are we making trade-offs consciously, or ignoring environmental dimensions entirely?

When designing processes or systems: Are we building in resource efficiency and environmental responsibility from the start, or creating systems that will generate unnecessary environmental impact?

This practice is not about blocking everything with environmental concerns but about ensuring that environmental considerations are part of the analysis rather than invisible. Sometimes environmental trade-offs will be made consciously for good reasons; what matters is that they are conscious.

Team leader role: Ask questions about environmental implications as a normal part of review and decision-making. Model integration of environmental considerations in your own analysis. Ensure that environmental criteria are included in evaluation frameworks. Recognise and appreciate when team members raise environmental considerations.

Scaffold 3: Cultivating a mindful relationship to consumption and resources

Purpose: Beyond specific practices and decisions lies a deeper question about orientation—the team’s fundamental relationship to consumption and resources. Is the default toward more, or is sufficiency valued? Is resource use treated as a constraint to be minimised, or as an area of genuine care? This scaffold addresses the cultural and attitudinal dimension of resource consciousness.

Format: Create periodic opportunities (perhaps quarterly) for the team to reflect on its relationship to resources and consumption:

Examine assumptions: What assumptions about resource use operate in the team, often unexamined? Is growth always assumed to be positive? Is more always better? Is convenience treated as an overriding value? These assumptions shape countless small decisions.

Consider sufficiency: Where might “enough” be the right goal rather than “more”? What does the team genuinely need versus what has it accumulated through habit or unexamined expansion? The culture of constant growth and consumption that characterises much of modern life operates within teams too; examining it explicitly creates possibility for different choices.

Connect to values: How does the team's resource use reflect—or contradict—its stated values? If the organisation or team claims commitment to sustainability, do everyday practices align with that commitment, or is there a gap between rhetoric and reality?

Attend to the larger context: The team's consumption patterns exist within larger cultural and economic patterns of excessive consumption that are driving environmental crisis. Attending to this larger context is not about individual guilt but about recognising that team choices are connected to larger systems and that even small choices can be acts of integrity that align local practice with larger values.

Model and share: When team members make choices that reflect mindful resource use—choosing the train instead of the plane, reducing unnecessary printing, questioning whether a new purchase is really needed—notice and appreciate these choices. They help shift team culture.

This scaffold is not about enforcing austerity or creating judgment. It is about bringing consciousness to an area that often operates unconsciously, and creating team culture where resource consciousness is valued rather than seen as eccentric or obstructive.

Team leader role: Create space for reflection on resource culture. Model mindful resource use in your own choices. Appreciate team members who demonstrate resource consciousness. Avoid creating shame or judgment while still encouraging thoughtfulness. Connect team practices to larger values and purposes.

Connection to other IDGs: These scaffolds support Connectedness (conscious resource use reflects awareness of ecological interdependence), Integrity and Authenticity (aligning resource use with values is integrity in practice), Systems Thinking (understanding environmental impact requires systems perspective), Long-Term Orientation (resource consciousness considers long-term consequences), and Inner Compass (responsible resource use expresses care for larger wholes).

8.4 Proactivity — Taking initiative toward what matters

What it means as a collective capability

At the individual level, proactivity means practicing future-oriented, accountable stewardship in the face of urgent challenges, grounded in solidarity and care for human dignity and the living Earth. At the team level, this becomes collective proactivity—the team's capacity to take initiative rather than waiting for direction, to anticipate needs rather than only responding to demands, and to act on emerging opportunities and challenges before they become crises.

Teams vary in their proactivity. Some teams are primarily reactive—they respond to requests, follow instructions, and deal with problems as they arise. Other teams are proactive—they identify what needs to happen and initiate it, they anticipate problems and address them early, they see opportunities and act on them without waiting for permission. Proactive teams create more value and have more impact than reactive teams of similar skill.

Proactivity takes on particular importance regarding sustainability and environmental challenges. These challenges require action before crisis becomes unavoidable, attention to problems that are not yet urgent but are foreseeable, and initiative to address issues that others may be ignoring. Teams that wait for clear direction or immediate pressure before acting on environmental and social issues will always be too late; proactivity means acting on what can be foreseen, not just what is demanded.

Scaffolds

Scaffold 1: Anticipating and addressing emerging issues

Purpose: Many problems are easier to address when they are small than when they have grown into crises. Proactive teams pay attention to emerging issues and address them early rather than waiting until they become urgent. This forward-looking stance reduces the number of crises the team faces and increases the team's effectiveness.

Format: Create regular practices for scanning the horizon. What is coming that the team should be aware of? What trends are developing? What potential problems are emerging? This might be a regular agenda item in team meetings, a dedicated periodic discussion, or an ongoing practice of sharing observations about what is emerging.

Include environmental and sustainability dimensions in this scanning. What environmental risks or opportunities are emerging that relate to the team's work? What developments in climate, resources, regulation, or public expectations might affect the team? What sustainability-related issues might the team need to address before they become urgent?

When potential issues are identified, assess whether early action is warranted. Not everything requires immediate response, but many things are better addressed early. Create permission and expectation to act on emerging issues without waiting for them to become urgent. Recognise and appreciate early intervention that prevents problems from growing.

Team leader role: Model forward-looking attention. Create structures for horizon scanning. Encourage early action on emerging issues, including sustainability-related issues. Recognise and appreciate proactive intervention. Distinguish between proactivity and unnecessary alarm—the goal is appropriate early action, not anxiety about everything that might go wrong.

Scaffold 2: Taking initiative without waiting for permission

Purpose: In many teams, initiative is stifled by assumption that action requires explicit permission. People see things that need doing but wait for someone to tell them to do it. Proactive teams create cultures where people take appropriate initiative without waiting to be directed, acting on their judgment about what would be helpful.

Format: Create explicit permission for initiative. Make clear that people are expected to act on their judgment, not wait for instruction. Clarify the boundaries of autonomous action—what kinds of decisions can people make independently, and what requires consultation? When in doubt, encourage people to err toward action rather than inaction.

Respond well when people take initiative, even when their judgment differs from what you would have done. If initiative is punished when it does not match the leader's preferences, people learn to wait for direction. Create culture where reasonable initiative is appreciated regardless of whether the leader would have chosen the same action.

Team leader role: Create explicit permission and expectation for initiative. Clarify boundaries of autonomous action. Respond well when people act on their judgment. Never punish reasonable initiative even when you would have chosen differently. Recognise and appreciate proactive action.

Scaffold 3: Owning outcomes rather than just completing tasks

Purpose: Reactive teams complete tasks they are assigned. Proactive teams take ownership of outcomes—they care not just about completing their assigned piece but about the larger result

being achieved, including the environmental and social consequences of what they produce. This ownership mindset leads people to do whatever is needed to achieve results, not just what they were specifically asked to do.

Format: Frame work in terms of outcomes to achieve, not just tasks to complete. Help people see how their work connects to larger results, including results that matter for stakeholders, communities, and environment. Create accountability for outcomes, not just activities—the question is not just “did you do what you were assigned?” but “did we achieve what we were trying to achieve, and did we do so responsibly?”

Extend ownership to include consequences beyond immediate task completion. Does the team feel responsible for whether its work actually produces the intended benefits? Does it feel responsible for avoiding or minimising negative consequences, including environmental consequences? Encourage people to go beyond their assigned scope when needed to achieve good results and avoid harm.

Team leader role: Frame work in terms of outcomes, including broader consequences. Create accountability for results. Appreciate people who go beyond assigned tasks to ensure good outcomes. Model outcome ownership yourself. Help people see how their work connects to larger purposes and consequences.

Connection to other IDGs: These scaffolds support Inner Compass (outcome ownership reflects care for what the work accomplishes), Systems Thinking (seeing outcomes requires seeing how pieces connect and what consequences follow), Co-Creation Skills (collective outcome ownership enables genuine collaboration), Long-Term Orientation (proactivity considers future consequences), and Connectedness (ownership of broader consequences reflects care for larger wholes).

8.5 Resilience — Persisting through difficulty and setback

What it means as a collective capability

At the individual level, resilience means navigating adversity with agility, staying engaged, and persevering even when progress is slow or uncertain. At the team level, this becomes collective resilience—the team’s capacity to persist through difficulty, recover from setbacks, adapt to changing circumstances, and maintain commitment over the long timeframes that significant accomplishment requires.

Teams face obstacles, setbacks, and periods of difficulty. Some teams collapse under pressure or give up after setbacks. Other teams persist through difficulty, learn from failures, adapt to obstacles, and continue toward their goals despite challenges. This resilience is not merely individual determination multiplied; it emerges from team culture and practices that support sustained collective effort.

Resilience takes on particular significance for teams working in awareness of climate crisis, ecological degradation, and political instability. Beyond the normal challenges of any work, these teams face the additional challenge of a larger context that can feel overwhelming and discouraging. Progress on sustainability challenges is often slow; setbacks are frequent; the gap between what is needed and what is being done can feel crushing. The risk of hopelessness, despair, and disengagement is real.

In this context, resilience means more than bouncing back from specific setbacks. It means sustaining meaningful engagement over time despite uncertainty about whether efforts will be

sufficient, despite a steady stream of discouraging news, despite the emotional weight of caring about challenges that can feel beyond human capacity to address. This kind of resilience requires practices that help teams process difficult realities without being paralysed by them, and that sustain commitment to action even when outcomes cannot be guaranteed.

Scaffolds

Scaffold 1: Learning from setbacks rather than being defeated by them

Purpose: Setbacks are inevitable. The question is whether they defeat the team or become opportunities for learning and improvement. Teams that can extract learning from failures and apply it going forward become stronger through difficulty. Teams that treat failures only as defeats lose both the immediate effort and the potential learning.

Format: When setbacks occur, create structured opportunities to learn from them. After the immediate crisis is addressed, ask: What happened? Why? What can we learn? What would we do differently? How can we apply this learning going forward? Document and retain key learnings so they inform future work.

Frame setbacks as learning opportunities, not just failures. This does not mean pretending failures are successes or avoiding accountability—it means extracting value from difficult experiences by learning from them. The goal is not to have fewer setbacks (though that may result) but to become better through them.

When working on long-term challenges like sustainability, setbacks are part of the process. Major change efforts always encounter resistance, reversal, and failure along the way. Help the team distinguish between setbacks that signal the need for adjustment and setbacks that are simply part of any long-term change process. Not every setback means the approach is wrong; sometimes it just means the work is hard.

Team leader role: Model learning from your own setbacks. Create structures for learning after failures. Frame difficulties as learning opportunities. Ensure learning is captured and applied. Distinguish between learning (valuable) and blame (usually destructive). Help the team maintain perspective on setbacks in the context of long-term change.

Scaffold 2: Maintaining momentum through difficulty

Purpose: Difficult periods can stall team momentum. Energy flags, people become discouraged, progress slows or stops. For teams working in awareness of global challenges, difficulty may be not a temporary period but a sustained context—a constant awareness of problems that can feel overwhelming. Resilient teams maintain momentum even through such difficulty—perhaps at reduced pace, but without losing the forward motion that keeps progress accumulating.

Format: During difficult periods, focus on maintaining forward motion rather than achieving breakthroughs. Identify small, achievable actions that keep progress accumulating. Celebrate small successes that demonstrate continued movement. Maintain team rhythms and routines that provide structure and normalcy. Stay connected to purpose—remember why the work matters.

When the larger context is discouraging—when climate news is bad, when political developments feel like setbacks, when the gap between problem and progress seems unbridgeable—employ specific practices to sustain engagement:

Solution-focused attention: Shift from dwelling on the overwhelming scale of problems to concrete questions about what the team can do. What is the next step? What can we influence? What small progress can we make today? This is not denial of larger problems but deliberate focus on actionable possibilities.

Progress tracking: Deliberately document and track progress, even when it feels small relative to need. Create visible record of what the team has accomplished. Counter the tendency to forget or dismiss progress by making it concrete and visible.

Scope management: Be clear about what the team is responsible for and what is beyond its scope. The team cannot solve climate change or fix political systems; it can contribute within its sphere of influence. Keeping scope appropriate protects against the paralysis that comes from feeling responsible for everything.

Collective support: Build team practices that help members sustain engagement. Check in on how people are doing, not just what they are producing. Create space for processing difficult emotions. Support each other through discouragement. Share sources of hope and energy.

Sustainable pace: Recognise that meaningful change takes time and requires effort that can be sustained over years, not heroic sprints that lead to burnout. Pace the work accordingly.

Accept that pace may need to slow during difficulty. Trying to maintain full speed through extended difficulty leads to burnout. Sustainable resilience means adjusting pace as needed while maintaining direction. The goal is not to pretend difficulty does not exist but to persist through it without losing momentum entirely.

Team leader role: Help the team focus on achievable actions during difficult periods. Celebrate small successes. Maintain team rhythms and connection. Adjust expectations appropriately while maintaining forward motion. Keep purpose visible. Model sustained engagement through difficulty. Watch for signs that team members are struggling and provide support.

Scaffold 3: Recovering and rebuilding after significant setbacks

Purpose: Some setbacks are significant enough that maintaining momentum is not possible—major failures, departures of key people, external shocks that disrupt the team’s work, or developments in the larger context that feel devastating. Resilient teams can recover from such significant setbacks, rebuilding capability and resuming progress after periods of disruption.

Format: After significant setbacks, allow time for processing. Major disruptions require acknowledgment and, often, grieving. This may include grieving about developments beyond the team—environmental destruction, political reversals, loss of progress on issues the team cares about. Rushing past this undermines eventual recovery. Create space for people to process what happened and what it means.

Then deliberately rebuild. Assess what capabilities remain and what must be reconstructed. Identify what can be salvaged from previous work. Develop a path forward that is realistic given current circumstances. Rebuild deliberately rather than trying to immediately resume previous activity.

Recovery after significant setback often requires accepting that things have changed and adapting rather than trying to restore the previous state. For teams working on sustainability and social challenges, this may mean adjusting goals, finding new approaches, or accepting that the context has shifted in ways that require different strategies.

Throughout recovery, maintain connection to purpose and to others working toward similar goals. Isolation makes recovery harder; connection to larger movement provides resources for rebuilding. Seek out sources of hope and energy. Share the work of recovery with allies and collaborators.

Team leader role: Create space for processing significant setbacks, including time for grief and acknowledgment of loss. Lead honest assessment of current situation. Develop realistic recovery path. Maintain connection to purpose while adapting plans. Support people through difficult transitions. Connect with allies and collaborators during recovery. Model recovery—demonstrate that setbacks, even significant ones, can be survived and overcome.

Connection to other IDGs: These scaffolds support Openness and Learning Mindset (learning from setbacks requires learning orientation), Empathy and Compassion (supporting people through difficult recovery requires care), Forgiveness (recovery may require letting go of grievances), Courage (rebuilding after significant setback requires courage to try again), Hope and Optimism (resilience and hope are deeply connected—each sustains the other), and Connectedness (connection to movement and larger purpose sustains resilience).

Summary: The Acting dimension

The scaffolds in this section address how the team translates intention into action and sustains effort over time. They help teams take bold action despite uncertainty, maintain belief that progress is possible, attend responsibly to environmental consequences of resource use, take initiative toward what matters, and persist through difficulty and setback. These action capabilities determine whether good intentions produce actual results.

Effective action is not simply a matter of trying harder. It requires creating conditions that enable courageous action, sustaining hope through realistic assessment of progress, using resources responsibly with attention to environmental consequences, cultivating proactive initiative, and building capacity to persist through inevitable difficulties. Without these capabilities, teams exhaust themselves in unsustainable bursts, lose momentum when facing obstacles, or never move from planning to doing.

The Acting dimension takes on particular significance in a time of climate crisis and global instability. Teams working toward sustainability, social justice, and the SDGs face not only practical challenges but also the psychological challenge of sustaining engagement when the scale of problems can feel overwhelming. The scaffolds in this chapter address both dimensions—the practical capabilities for effective action and the psychological and cultural practices that enable teams to sustain meaningful effort over the long timeframes that significant change requires.

Conscious use of resources deserves particular emphasis as a capability that connects team-level practice to planetary-scale responsibility. The environmental consequences of how teams operate and what they produce matter. Bringing awareness and intention to this dimension of work is one way teams can align their daily practices with the values of sustainability and care for the living Earth.

Start with the scaffolds that address your team's most significant action gaps. A team that avoids necessary risks might focus on building collective courage. A team losing motivation or struggling with despair might prioritise hope and resilience scaffolds. A team that has not attended to its environmental impact might begin with conscious resource use practices. A team that waits for direction might benefit from proactivity practices. Whatever your starting point,

the aim is to build action capability that turns the team's understanding and intentions into sustained, responsible effort toward meaningful goals.

When scaffolds for the Acting dimension aren't taking hold

If you've tried scaffolds for Acting capabilities and they're not working, consider:

Check the foundation: Acting capabilities require both clarity about purpose (what we're trying to accomplish) and sufficient resources (time, energy, authority). Without these, practices to build courage or resilience will feel hollow. Hope scaffolds require that there is genuine reason for hope—that the team's efforts actually matter and can contribute to meaningful outcomes. If the work feels genuinely futile, the issue may not be the scaffolds but the situation.

Check for hidden constraints: What makes it difficult for action to develop? Is there such overwhelming demand that any new initiative feels impossible? Do organisational systems punish failure, making courage too risky? Is the team so depleted that resilience practices cannot overcome exhaustion? Are there structural barriers that prevent the team from actually taking initiative? Are environmental and sustainability concerns dismissed or punished in the organisational culture?

Attend to the emotional dimension: If team members are struggling with despair, eco-anxiety, or hopelessness about the global situation, action scaffolds may not be enough. These feelings are legitimate responses to real circumstances. Consider whether the team needs space to process these emotions, whether additional support might be needed, or whether connecting with others facing similar challenges might help. Sometimes the most important work is tending to people's capacity to engage before expecting action.

Try a different entry point: The suggested scaffolds are not the only way to develop Acting capabilities. If formal practices are not working, action capability might develop through: success on small, achievable goals that builds confidence; removing obstacles rather than adding practices; external connection that provides hope and energy; or new team members who model courage or proactivity.

Accept current limits: Sometimes teams lack the actual capacity for action, and no amount of scaffolding will create it. It may be more productive to: focus on recovery and resource building before expecting action; accept that this team's role may be more supportive than initiating; address structural constraints (authority, resources, time) before expecting action capabilities; or acknowledge that the team may need support beyond what team-level scaffolds can provide.

PART III

Implementation and Sustainability

9. Getting started: Assessing your team's needs

The previous chapters have described scaffolds for all 25 IDG skills and qualities. No team should try to implement all of them at once. This chapter provides guidance for assessing which capabilities your team most needs to develop, how to involve the team in selecting and adapting scaffolds, and how to sequence implementation over time.

9.1 Assessing energy cost and sustainability

Before implementing any scaffold, consider not just whether it addresses an important need, but whether it can realistically be sustained given your team's current energy and capacity.

Ask yourself:

Time cost: How much time will this practice actually require, including preparation, facilitation, and follow-up? Be honest—most practices take longer than they appear on paper.

Attention cost: Does this practice require deep focus and presence, or can it happen alongside other work? Practices requiring sustained attention are harder to maintain when the team is under pressure.

Maintenance cost: What needs to happen for this practice to continue? If it requires you to actively remind people every time, it has high maintenance cost and is fragile.

Opportunity cost: What will you stop doing to make room for this? Vague answers like “we’ll be more efficient” usually mean the practice will be squeezed out.

Some warning signs that a practice may be too energy-expensive:

It requires extensive preparation every time. It only works when everyone is present (difficult with distributed teams or varying schedules). It depends on a single person's sustained effort. It requires people to do work outside their normal flow.

If a practice looks important but energy-expensive, consider:

Starting with a minimal version that requires less investment. Piggybacking it onto existing rhythms rather than creating new time. Building toward it gradually rather than launching it fully formed.

9.2 A simple self-assessment process

Before selecting scaffolds to implement, spend time understanding your team's current capabilities and most pressing needs. This assessment does not need to be elaborate—a simple reflective process involving the team leader and team members can provide sufficient guidance for getting started.

Step 1: Review the five dimensions. Read through the descriptions of the five IDG dimensions (Being, Thinking, Relating, Collaborating, Acting) and their component skills and qualities. For each dimension, consider: How well does our team currently function in this area? Where

do we seem to struggle or fall short? What would improve if we developed stronger capability here?

Step 2: Identify pain points and recurring problems. Rather than starting from the IDG framework, start from actual problems the team experiences. What issues come up repeatedly? What complaints or frustrations do team members express? What kinds of situations does the team handle poorly? These pain points often point toward underlying capability gaps. A team that repeatedly experiences destructive conflict may need stronger capability in Communication Skills and Forgiveness. A team that struggles to follow through on commitments may need attention to Integrity and Resilience. A team that gets blindsided by problems may need better Systems Thinking and Proactivity.

Step 3: Consider strategic priorities. What is the team trying to accomplish? What capabilities would most support success in current priorities? A team facing a major change initiative may need stronger Resilience and Hope. A team working on complex problems may need better Systems Thinking and Perspective Skills. A team expanding or onboarding new members may need attention to Relationship-Building and Inclusive Mindset. Align capability development with what the team is actually trying to do. This includes considering how the team's work connects to larger purposes—whether organisational mission, sustainability commitments, or contribution to societal challenges.

Step 4: Assess current strengths. Not everything requires attention. What does the team already do well? Where are capabilities already adequate or strong? Building on strengths is often more effective than focusing only on weaknesses. A team with strong relationship foundations might extend that strength into better Co-Creation practices. A team with good reflection habits might deepen into Self-Awareness and Presence. Recognise what is working and consider how to build on it.

Step 5: Prioritize. Based on this review, identify two to four IDG skills or qualities that seem most important to address. Do not try to work on everything at once. Prioritization criteria might include: urgency (what is causing problems right now?), leverage (what would make the biggest difference?), readiness (where is the team most ready to develop?), and feasibility (what can realistically be implemented given current constraints?).

9.3 Involving the team in selecting and adapting scaffolds

While the team leader may do initial assessment, involving the team in selecting and designing scaffolds increases ownership and improves fit. People are more likely to engage genuinely with practices they helped choose than with practices imposed on them.

Share your assessment. Present your preliminary thinking to the team. Explain the IDG framework briefly, describe the areas you think are most important to develop, and explain your reasoning. Invite response: Do team members see things differently? What have you missed? What resonates?

Gather team input. Ask team members about their experience of team functioning. What works well? What could be better? What capabilities would they like to develop? You might gather this input through team discussion, individual conversations, or brief written reflections. Different formats work better for different people and situations—some people speak more freely one-on-one, while others do better with anonymous written input.

Review scaffold options together. Once priority areas are identified, review the relevant scaffolds from this handbook together. Discuss: Which of these seem most useful for our situa-

tion? How would we need to adapt them to fit our context? What would make them more or less likely to work here? This collaborative design process often produces better solutions than either the team leader or handbook alone could provide.

Make decisions together. Decide as a team which scaffolds to implement, with what adaptations, starting when. This does not mean endless discussion or consensus on every detail—the team leader may need to make final calls. But genuine team input on what practices to adopt significantly increases the likelihood of successful implementation.

Build in adaptation from the start. Treat initial implementation as an experiment rather than a permanent installation. Agree to try a scaffold for a defined period (perhaps six to twelve weeks), then assess whether it is working and how it might be improved. This experimental frame makes it easier for people to engage—they are not committing to something forever, just trying something to see how it works.

9.4 Sequencing: Which scaffolds to start with

The order in which you implement scaffolds matters. Some practices build on others; some create conditions that make other practices possible; some are relatively easy to implement while others require more preparation.

Start with psychological safety. If psychological safety is low, many other scaffolds will not work well. Reflection practices require honesty about difficulties, but people will not be honest if they fear negative consequences. Perspective-seeking requires willingness to express minority views, but people will not speak up if they fear judgment. Co-creation requires vulnerability, but people will not be vulnerable if they feel unsafe. Address psychological safety first or in parallel with other scaffolds. If psychological safety is already reasonably good, you can proceed with other priorities.

Consider foundational capabilities. Some capabilities support others. Self-Awareness supports effective communication. Presence supports genuine dialogue. Systems Thinking supports better decision-making. Working on foundational capabilities often makes it easier to develop related capabilities later. That said, you do not need to achieve mastery in foundations before addressing other areas—development can proceed in parallel.

Start where energy is. If the team is excited about a particular area, that energy can carry implementation forward even if the area is not theoretically the highest priority. Early success builds momentum and creates appetite for further development. Starting where there is energy and achieving visible progress often works better than starting with the most important-but-difficult area.

Address urgent pain points. If a particular capability gap is causing immediate problems, addressing it may be more important than developing other areas, even if those other areas are more foundational. A team in destructive conflict needs conflict transformation capability now, not eventually. Urgent problems demand attention even when a more logical development sequence might suggest different priorities.

Consider energy recovery and sustainable pacing

Teams, like individuals, have limited capacity for change. A team that has recently been through major stress, reorganisation, or demanding projects may need time to recover before taking on new practices.

Warning signs that a team lacks energy for new practices:

Consistently behind on basic work. High levels of stress or burnout indicators. Recent major changes (leadership transition, restructuring, project failures). Turnover or team composition changes. Widespread cynicism or exhaustion.

If energy is low:

Option 1 — Recovery first: Focus on reducing load and creating space for recovery before introducing new practices. Sometimes the most important “capability development” is rest.

Option 2 — Minimal, supportive practices: If development can’t wait, choose practices that support rather than burden: brief check-ins that surface where people are struggling, appreciation practices that don’t require preparation, reducing ineffective existing practices (creating space), permission for flexibility and self-care.

Option 3 — Piggyback on existing rhythms: Rather than adding new practices, modify existing ones: add 5 minutes of reflection to existing meetings, shift how existing retrospectives are facilitated, build on informal practices that already work.

Sequencing for sustainable development:

Start when the team has capacity (after project completion, not during crisis). Begin with practices that reduce burden or create space. Add practices that require investment only when the team has recovered energy. Allow time for practices to become routine before adding more. Periodically check: is this pace sustainable, or are we depleting ourselves?

Energy recovery is not wasted time: A team that has recovered capacity will develop new capabilities faster and more sustainably than an exhausted team forced to adopt new practices.

Limit the number of new practices. Implementing too many scaffolds at once overwhelms people and reduces the quality of attention given to each. Start with one to three scaffolds, let them become established, then consider adding more. Each new practice requires time and attention to implement well. Rushing to implement many practices simultaneously typically results in none of them working well.

Build incrementally over time. Think in terms of quarters and years, not weeks. Implement a few scaffolds, let them become routine, assess and adjust, then add more. Over time, the team accumulates practices that support collective capability across multiple IDG dimensions. This patient, incremental approach mirrors the nature of the challenges many teams are working toward—sustainable development, social change, and organisational transformation all require sustained effort over extended periods.

10. Sustaining and evolving scaffolds over time

Installing a scaffold is only the beginning. Practices must be sustained over time to build collective capability, and they must evolve as the team develops. This matters because meaningful contribution to complex challenges—whether related to organisational goals or broader societal purposes—requires capabilities that are durably embedded, not temporarily installed. This chapter addresses how to keep scaffolds alive and effective over the long term.

10.1 The risk of practices becoming hollow rituals

Any recurring practice can become empty ritual. The form persists while the substance drains away. The team does the retrospective, but no one shares honestly. The check-in happens, but people give formulaic responses. The decision process includes perspective-seeking, but no one actually changes their mind based on what they hear. When practices become hollow, they consume time without producing benefit—or worse, they breed cynicism about the possibility of genuine improvement.

Signs of hollowing: People go through motions without genuine engagement. Responses become formulaic and predictable. The practice takes less time than it should because people are not doing the real work. Nothing changes as a result of the practice—it produces no learning, no decisions, no shifts in behaviour. People express cynicism or frustration about the practice, or actively try to avoid it.

Recognising hollowing early (before it becomes entrenched)

Hollow practices often develop gradually. Early warning signs:

Week 2–4:

Participation is dutiful rather than engaged. People give brief, safe responses rather than genuine reflection. The practice takes less time than it should (rushing through).

Week 6–12:

Some people always contribute; others are consistently silent. Responses become formulaic (“everything’s fine”, “keep doing what we’re doing”). People check devices or multitask during the practice. The practice is often skipped without anyone objecting.

Month 4+:

No one remembers why the practice was started. Nothing changes as a result of the practice. People express cynicism or frustration about it. Active avoidance (people schedule conflicts, come late, leave early).

What to do at each stage:

Early stage (weeks 2–4): Adjust format or facilitation. Often the issue is technique, not fundamental mismatch.

Mid stage (weeks 6–12): Have an explicit conversation about whether the practice is serving its purpose. Consider significant modification or a break.

Late stage (month 4+): Probably time to discontinue. A practice this hollow is doing more harm than good. Better to stop, reflect on what didn’t work, and either try something different or accept that this capability may need to develop another way.

Prevention is easier than cure: Better to discontinue a practice proactively when you notice early warning signs than to let it become a zombie ritual.

Preventing and addressing hollowing: Attend to the conditions that enable genuine engagement, particularly psychological safety and follow-through. Vary the format periodically to maintain freshness—different questions, different structures, different facilitation approaches. Protect adequate time so practices can go deep rather than rushing through. Model genuine engagement yourself. Periodically ask the team: Is this practice still serving us? What would make it more valuable? If a practice has become hollow, acknowledge it and either revitalize or replace it rather than continuing the charade.

10.2 Periodic review: Assessing whether scaffolds are serving their purpose

Scaffolds exist to build collective capability. Periodically assess whether they are actually doing so. This assessment should happen at least quarterly, and more frequently for newly implemented practices.

Questions for review: Is the practice happening as intended? (Frequency, participation, quality of engagement.) Is it producing the intended results? (What changes has it led to? What capability has developed?) Is it worth the time and effort? (Could the same benefit be achieved more efficiently? Is the benefit large enough to justify the investment?) What would make it more effective? (Format changes, timing adjustments, facilitation improvements.) Should it continue, be modified, or be discontinued?

Gather diverse input. Team leaders may have different perspectives on practice effectiveness than team members. Some people may find a practice valuable while others find it unhelpful. Gather input from different team members, not just those most vocal. Use the review process as an opportunity to model the reflective practices the team is trying to develop.

Distinguish between implementation problems and design problems. When a scaffold is not working well, consider whether the problem is in how it is being implemented or in the design of the practice itself. Implementation problems (insufficient time, poor facilitation, lack of follow-through) can often be fixed while keeping the basic practice. Design problems (wrong format for this team, addressing the wrong issue) require changing or replacing the scaffold. Do not abandon a good practice because of fixable implementation problems, but also do not keep trying to fix a practice that is fundamentally wrong for your context.

Noticing what's actually working vs. what you planned to work

An important distinction: the practice you implemented may not be producing the benefit you expected, but it may be producing a different benefit. Or, the intended benefit may be coming from something else entirely.

Watch for:

Emergent practices: Informal behaviours or patterns that developed alongside or instead of the formal scaffold. For example, you introduced structured retrospectives, but the real learning happens in hallway conversations afterward. The formal practice may be serving mainly to trigger the informal one.

Exaptation: The practice is being used for a different purpose than intended, but a valuable one. For example, appreciation rounds intended to build positive culture are actually serving as a check-in on workload and wellbeing.

Alternative constructors: The capability is developing, but through different mechanisms than the scaffold you introduced. For instance, critical thinking is improving not through the designated challenger role, but because a particular team member asks good questions naturally.

When you notice emergent practices or alternative constructors:

Recognise and name them explicitly. Consider whether the formal scaffold is still needed or if it can be retired. Look for ways to support what's actually working rather than forcing what was planned.

The goal is not fidelity to the original design but actual capability development, however it happens.

10.3 Adapting scaffolds as the team develops

As teams develop capability, their needs change. Scaffolds appropriate for a team at one stage may need to evolve as the team matures. This evolution is a sign of success, not failure.

From structured to organic. Early-stage teams often need highly structured practices: explicit check-in formats, detailed retrospective protocols, structured decision processes. As capability develops, teams may be able to engage in the same activities with less structure. The formal retrospective becomes a more organic reflective conversation. The structured perspective-seeking becomes natural inclusion of diverse views. The scaffold has done its work when the capability exists without needing the full structure. This does not mean abandoning all structure—some structure helps even highly capable teams—but the structure can become lighter.

From basic to sophisticated. Teams that have developed basic capability may be ready for more sophisticated practices. A team that has learned to do basic after-action reviews might evolve toward more complex learning practices. A team that has developed basic systems thinking habits might take on more sophisticated systems mapping. Match practice sophistication to team capability—not so simple that it is boring, not so complex that it overwhelms.

From frequent to periodic. Some practices need to be frequent while a team is building capability, then can become less frequent once the capability is established. Weekly attention to psychological safety might become monthly attention once the culture is well-established. Frequent check-ins might become less frequent once relational connection is strong. Maintain enough frequency to sustain capability without making practices feel unnecessary or burdensome.

Integrating practices. As teams accumulate multiple scaffolds, look for opportunities to integrate them. Multiple separate practices can become unwieldy. A monthly meeting might combine reflection, appreciation, and forward-looking elements that were originally separate practices. Integration reduces overhead while maintaining the substance of multiple capabilities. Be careful that integration does not compress practices so much that they lose their effectiveness—combining requires adequate time for each element.

10.4 When to let go of a scaffold and try something different

Not every scaffold will work for every team. Sometimes the right response to a struggling practice is not to try harder but to let it go and try something different. Knowing when to persist and when to abandon requires judgment that cannot be fully captured in rules, but some guidelines help.

Give practices adequate time. New practices often feel awkward at first. People need time to learn the format, develop comfort, and build the habits that make the practice effective. Do not abandon a practice after two or three iterations just because it has not yet produced dramatic results. Most scaffolds need at least six to twelve weeks to become established. Persist through initial awkwardness before concluding that a practice does not work.

But do not persist indefinitely with failure. If a practice has been given adequate time and reasonable implementation effort but is still not producing benefit, continuing it is not persistence but stubbornness. Sunk costs should not determine future decisions. Practices that consume time without benefit should be modified or discontinued so that time can be invested in something more effective.

Distinguish between practice failure and need failure. A practice might fail because the team does not actually need what the practice provides, or because the practice is the wrong way to meet a genuine need. If retrospectives are not working, does that mean the team does not need reflection (unlikely), or that this particular reflection format does not suit this team (more likely)? When a practice fails, consider whether to abandon the underlying goal or try a different approach to the same goal.

Let go gracefully. When discontinuing a practice, do so explicitly rather than letting it fade away. Acknowledge what was learned from the experiment. Explain why you are making the change. This models the learning orientation the team is trying to develop and avoids confusion about whether the practice is still expected to happen.

Stay open to returning later. A practice that does not work now might work later, when the team has developed other capabilities or when circumstances have changed. Do not permanently rule out practices just because they did not work in the past. Revisit discontinued practices periodically to assess whether the time might now be right.

11. Working within organisational constraints

This handbook is designed for team leaders who want to build collective capability without requiring organisation-wide transformation. However, teams exist within organisations, and organisational context shapes what is possible. This chapter addresses how to work effectively within organisational constraints while still making meaningful progress.

11.1 What a team leader can do independently

Most scaffolds in this handbook can be implemented by a team leader without requiring permission or resources from above. Understanding what is within your authority helps focus effort on what is actually possible.

Meeting formats and agendas. Team leaders generally control how team meetings are structured. You can add check-ins, reflection time, perspective-seeking processes, and appreciation practices to meetings without external approval. The organisation may require certain agenda items, but how you structure the time within those constraints is usually up to you.

Team norms and expectations. How the team works together—communication patterns, feedback practices, decision processes—is largely within team leader authority to shape. You can establish norms for constructive disagreement, psychological safety, proactive communication, and mutual support without needing organisational approval.

Your own behaviour and modelling. You fully control how you yourself act. You can model self-awareness, presence, humility, courage, and other IDG qualities in your own behaviour regardless of organisational context. Leader modelling is one of the most powerful influences on team culture and is entirely within your control.

How you give feedback and recognition. The organisation may have formal performance systems, but day-to-day feedback and recognition are within your control. You can recognise and appreciate behaviours aligned with IDG qualities, provide developmental feedback that supports growth, and create a feedback culture on your team regardless of organisational norms.

Informal learning and development. While formal training may require organisational resources and approval, informal learning is within your authority. You can share readings, facilitate discussions, encourage peer learning, and create opportunities for skill development within team activities.

11.2 What requires organisational support

Some aspects of capability development require organisational support or are significantly easier with it. Recognising these helps set realistic expectations and identify where to seek support.

Significant time allocation. While small amounts of time can be carved from existing activities, significant time investment (regular half-day reflection sessions, substantial training) may require organisational support to justify and protect. If workloads are set at organisational level with no slack, you may not have time for practices that require significant investment.

Budget for external resources. Bringing in external facilitators, trainers, or coaches requires budget. Some capability development benefits significantly from external expertise, but accessing that expertise requires organisational resources.

Changes to formal systems. Performance management, compensation, promotion criteria, and other formal systems are typically set at organisational level. If these systems undermine the capabilities you are trying to build (for example, rewarding individual competition when you are trying to build collaboration), your team-level efforts will face headwinds that organisational change could address.

Staffing and team composition. Who is on the team significantly affects collective capability. Hiring decisions, team assignments, and addressing seriously problematic individuals may require organisational support and authority beyond what a team leader has.

Protection from organisational pressures. Sometimes the team needs protection from organisational pressures that would undermine capability development—unrealistic deadlines, constant firefighting, excessive meeting demands. Providing this protection may require organisational support, particularly if the pressures come from senior levels.

11.3 Recognising immovable constraints vs. malleable ones

Not all organisational constraints are equal. Some are genuinely immovable, while others appear fixed but can actually shift with modest effort.

Typically immovable (accept and work within):

Fundamental business model or revenue structure. Core regulatory requirements. Senior leadership's non-negotiable priorities. Company-wide systems with high switching costs (Enterprise Resource Planning systems, Human Resource Information Systems, etc.). Basic organisational structure in large organisations.

Often movable with sustained effort:

Meeting culture and norms. How decisions are actually made (vs. how they're supposed to be made). Communication patterns. What gets measured and rewarded informally. Which rules are actually enforced vs. ignored.

Context-dependent (requires testing):

Budget allocation for team development. Flexibility in how work is organised. Protection from certain organisational pressures. Ability to experiment with new practices.

How to test if a constraint is movable:

Try a small violation and observe the response. If there's no pushback, it wasn't actually a constraint. Ask explicitly for an exception rather than assuming it won't be granted. Show results from a small experiment; success often creates space for broader change.

When you identify an immovable constraint:

Don't waste energy fighting it. Design practices that work within the constraint. Focus your energy on malleable areas where you can actually make progress.

11.4 How team-level practices can influence broader organisational culture

While this handbook focuses on team-level change, effective team practices can influence broader organisational culture over time. Teams serve as laboratories for new practices, demonstrating what is possible and providing models that others can adopt.

Demonstrate results. The most powerful way to influence organisational culture is to show that different practices produce better results. If your team develops effective ways of working that lead to better performance, reduced turnover, higher engagement, or other valued outcomes, others will notice and may want to learn from your approach. Document what you are doing and the results you are achieving so you can share them when asked.

Share practices generously. When other team leaders or organisational stakeholders are interested in your practices, share openly. Offer to explain what you are doing and why. Provide templates and resources. Avoid being proprietary about practices that could benefit others. This generosity builds goodwill and spreads effective practices through the organisation.

Connect with allies. You are probably not the only person in the organisation interested in developing collective capability. Find others who share your interests and values. Share experiences, learn from each other, and support each other's efforts. A network of people working on similar goals has more influence than isolated individuals.

Work through formal channels when appropriate. If your practices prove effective, there may be opportunities to propose broader adoption through formal organisational channels. Present your experience to leadership, propose pilot programmes, or offer to help other teams implement similar practices. Be patient—organisational change is slow—but persistent advocacy can eventually shift organisational norms. As more teams develop these collective capabilities, the organisation as a whole becomes better equipped to address the complex challenges it exists to serve.

11.5 Managing tensions between team-level practices and organisational norms

Sometimes team-level practices will be in tension with broader organisational culture or expectations. Managing these tensions requires judgment and strategic awareness.

Distinguish between real constraints and perceived constraints. People often assume they cannot do things that are actually permitted. Before accepting apparent constraints, test them. Ask: What would actually happen if we did this differently? Has anyone actually said we cannot do this? Often the answer is that there is more flexibility than assumed. Of course, some constraints are real—do not ignore genuine organisational requirements—but do not accept phantom constraints without verification.

Work within organisational systems where possible. Practices that work within existing organisational frameworks face less resistance than those that contradict or bypass organisational systems. If the organisation has formal meeting structures, work within them while adding your own elements. If the organisation has performance expectations, show how your practices support meeting those expectations. Framing your practices as enhancements rather than alternatives to organisational norms reduces friction.

Pick your battles. Not every tension is worth fighting. Some organisational norms are irritating but not worth the conflict required to change them. Focus energy on the tensions that most affect your ability to build collective capability. Accept minor frustrations and save your influence for issues that really matter.

Be strategic about visibility. Some practices are best developed quietly before drawing organisational attention. Others benefit from visibility and support. Consider whether to publicize your practices or keep them relatively private until they are well-established. Early visibility might bring support, but it might also bring scrutiny, interference, or pressure to scale

before the practices are ready. There is no universal answer—read your organisational context and make strategic choices.

Maintain integrity while working within constraints. You may not be able to do everything you would like, but you can always act with integrity within your constraints. Do not compromise on fundamental values or behave in ways that contradict what you are trying to build, even when organisational pressures push in that direction. Model the qualities you want to develop, even when the organisational context does not support them. Your own integrity is always within your control.

Building collective capability is a long-term endeavour. Start where you can, build on success, and persist through difficulty. The practices in this handbook are tools, not prescriptions—use them thoughtfully, adapt them to your context, and learn from experience. Whether your team works directly on sustainability, social equity, or public wellbeing, or contributes to these larger purposes through excellence in its everyday work, the capabilities developed through these practices are what enable meaningful contribution. Over time, the accumulation of effective practices can transform a team’s collective capability, enabling it to navigate complexity, work together effectively, and contribute meaningfully to the challenges it exists to address.

Appendix A: The 25 skills and qualities of the IDG framework

Being	Thinking	Relating	Collaborating	Acting
<p>Inner Compass A deeply felt commitment to live and act in accordance with values and purposes that serve the good of the whole.</p> <p>Integrity and Authenticity A sincere commitment to honesty and firmly grounded values, expressed and embodied in action.</p> <p>Openness and Learning Mindset A curious, adaptive attitude expressed through willingness to exchange perspectives, be vulnerable, welcome change, and grow.</p> <p>Self-Awareness Ability to be in reflective contact with thoughts, emotions, desires, and actions; to maintain a realistic self-image and to regulate oneself.</p> <p>Presence Capacity to be fully present in the here and now, to accept reality as it unfolds, and to respond in meaningful ways</p>	<p>Critical Thinking Ability to reflect on the validity of ideas, evidence, assumptions and plans.</p> <p>Perspective Skills Ability to learn from diverse perspectives and integrate insights into reflective sense-making and action.</p> <p>Systems Thinking Ability to understand complexity and work with the interconnections and properties of systems.</p> <p>Long-Term Orientation and Visioning Imagining long-term goals and staying committed to them in ways that support broader societal and ecological well-being.</p> <p>Creativity Ability to think outside conventional patterns, imagine new possibilities, and shape them into transformative ideas.</p>	<p>Appreciation Relating to people and planet Earth with a deep sense of gratitude, positive regard, and joy.</p> <p>Connectedness Feeling a sense of belonging to a larger whole, such as humanity, the planet's web of life, and the spiritual dimensions of existence.</p> <p>Humility Being able to respond to the needs of the situation without concern for one's own importance.</p> <p>Empathy and Compassion Connecting to others, oneself, and nature with kindness, care, and love, guided by the intention to reduce suffering.</p> <p>Forgiveness Willingness to transcend hostility, work through trauma, and create space for healing.</p>	<p>Relationship-Building Skills Nurturing relationships with emotional intelligence grounded in trust, respect, mutual understanding, and a spirit of collaboration.</p> <p>Inclusive Mindset and Intercultural Competence Willingness and competence to embrace diversity and include people and communities with different perspectives and backgrounds.</p> <p>Co-Creation Skills Facilitating collaborative processes with diverse stakeholders, fostering teamwork and psychological safety, and being aware of power dynamics.</p> <p>Communication Skills Ability to listen deeply, foster genuine dialogue, advocate one's views skillfully, manage conflicts constructively and adapt communication to diverse groups.</p> <p>Mobilization Skills Inspiring and enabling others to engage in shared purposes and collective action.</p>	<p>Courage Standing up for fundamental values, making decisions, taking action, and, when needed, questioning and disrupting established structures and views.</p> <p>Hope and Optimism Building and sustaining a shared belief in our capacity to create a more just, inclusive, and sustainable future.</p> <p>Conscious Use of Resources Acting with awareness of the planet's limited natural resources, prioritizing conservation, regeneration, and frugality to avoid harmful consumption.</p> <p>Proactivity Practicing future-oriented, accountable stewardship in the face of urgent challenges, grounded in solidarity and care for human dignity and the living Earth.</p> <p>Resilience Navigating adversity with agility, staying engaged, and persevering even when progress is slow or uncertain.</p>

Appendix B: Quick reference — Scaffolds by IDG

This appendix provides a quick reference summary of the scaffolds described in Part II, organised by IDG skill or quality. Use this to quickly identify relevant scaffolds for specific capability areas.

Being — Cultivating our inner life

IDG Skill/Quality	Key Scaffolds
Inner Compass	Quarterly purpose reflection dialogue; Purpose connection moments; Values emergence through decision-making
Integrity and Authenticity	Periodic values-behaviour alignment review; Values check in decision-making; Creating norms that welcome vulnerability
Openness and Learning Mindset	After-action reviews; Regular team retrospectives; Peer learning forums; Storytelling about lessons learned; Learning from external perspectives and critical voices
Self-Awareness	Periodic team health assessment; "How we work together" dialogues; Process-focused debriefs; Time-out signal for process awareness; Noticing and naming team patterns in real-time
Presence	Meeting check-ins; Intentional pauses; Protected time for genuine dialogue; Creating unconditional space for emergence

Thinking — Understanding complexity together

IDG Skill/Quality	Key Scaffolds
Critical Thinking	Designated challenger role; Pre-mortem analysis; Progressive assumption testing; Building norms that welcome constructive challenge
Perspective Skills	Perspective mapping dialogues; Perspective contrast exercises; Perspective rotation in problem analysis; Building perspective awareness into ongoing practice
Systems Thinking	Collaborative mapping of interconnections; Expanding the system boundary; Second-order effects questioning; Pattern identification discussions
Long-Term Orientation and Visioning	Regular long-term reflection sessions; Future generations perspective; Daily-to-long-term connection practices; Multi-horizon tracking; Long-term scenario exploration
Creativity	Dedicated exploration time; Creating permission for productive failure; Structured ideation sessions; Cross-boundary exposure

Relating — Caring for others and the world

IDG Skill/Quality	Key Scaffolds
Appreciation	Regular appreciation rounds; Milestone celebrations and pausing to appreciate; Appreciative framing in team discourse
Connectedness	Making connections vivid and real; Reflecting on belonging to larger wholes; Connectedness in decision-making
Humility	Deliberate learning from others; Normalising acknowledgment of limitations and uncertainty; Focus on contribution over credit
Empathy and Compassion	Building and maintaining psychological safety; Noticing and responding to struggles; Extending the circle of care; Compassionate accountability
Forgiveness	Norms for addressing harm directly; Structured approach to repair; Working through collective resentments and divisions

Collaborating — Building trust and working together

IDG Skill/Quality	Key Scaffolds
Relationship-Building Skills	Dedicated time for relationship-building; Building and maintaining psychological safety; Building and maintaining relationships across team boundaries
Inclusive Mindset and Intercultural Competence	Active inclusion practices in meetings and discussions; Addressing cultural differences constructively; Ensuring diverse perspectives shape decisions; Creating genuinely inclusive engagement with external actors
Co-Creation Skills	Collaborative working sessions; Facilitation for generative collaboration; Analysing and addressing power dynamics in collaboration; Building capability for co-creation with external actors
Communication Skills	Norms for effective information sharing; Practices for genuine dialogue; Constructive disagreement practices; Communication across organisational and cultural boundaries
Mobilisation Skills	Stakeholder engagement practices; Articulating and co-developing shared purpose; Coordination across team boundaries

Acting — Leading and enabling change

IDG Skill/Quality	Key Scaffolds
Courage	Creating permission for courageous voice; Calculated risk-taking practices; Standing firm on principles under pressure
Hope and Optimism	Celebrating progress and successes; Maintaining perspective through difficulty; Connecting to larger purpose and movement
Conscious Use of Resources	Examining and reducing the team's environmental footprint; Integrating resource consciousness into the team's work outputs; Cultivating a mindful relationship to consumption and resources
Proactivity	Anticipating and addressing emerging issues; Taking initiative without waiting for permission; Owning outcomes rather than just completing tasks
Resilience	Learning from setbacks rather than being defeated by them; Maintaining momentum through difficulty; Recovering and rebuilding after significant setbacks

Appendix C: Scaffolds by format type

This appendix organises scaffolds by implementation format rather than by IDG. Use this to identify what types of practices might fit your team's existing rhythms and structures, or to find alternative formats for building particular capabilities.

Meeting formats and agenda elements

These scaffolds can be integrated into regular team meetings or used as standalone meeting formats.

Format	Purpose	IDGs Supported
Check-ins (meeting opening)	Create presence, surface what people are bringing	Presence, Self-Awareness, Empathy
Appreciation rounds	Recognise contributions, build positive culture	Appreciation, Relationship-Building, Hope
Retrospectives	Learn from experience, improve practices	Openness and Learning, Critical Thinking, Self-Awareness
Perspective mapping dialogues	Surface and explore different ways of seeing issues	Perspective Skills, Inclusive Mindset, Systems Thinking
Pre-mortems	Anticipate problems, strengthen plans	Critical Thinking, Systems Thinking, Proactivity
Progressive assumption testing	Test critical assumptions before full commitment	Critical Thinking, Systems Thinking, Courage
Purpose connection moments	Link work to larger meaning	Inner Compass, Connectedness, Hope
Values emergence reviews	Discover actual values through examining decisions	Inner Compass, Integrity, Self-Awareness
Genuine dialogue sessions	Explore complex topics without rushing to decision	Communication Skills, Presence, Perspective Skills
Systems mapping sessions	Understand complex relationships and patterns	Systems Thinking, Perspective Skills, Long-Term Orientation
Progress celebrations	Maintain morale, recognise achievement	Hope and Optimism, Appreciation, Resilience
Time-out signal practice	Pause when patterns become unproductive	Self-Awareness, Presence, Communication Skills

Recurring practices and routines

These scaffolds establish ongoing practices that occur on regular schedules.

Practice	Typical Frequency	IDGs Supported
After-action reviews	After significant projects or events	Openness and Learning, Critical Thinking, Resilience
Team health assessments	Monthly or quarterly	Self-Awareness, Psychological Safety, Communication
Values-behaviour alignment reviews	Quarterly or semi-annually	Integrity, Inner Compass, Critical Thinking
Peer learning sessions	Monthly	Openness and Learning, Perspective Skills, Co-Creation
Long-term reflection sessions	Quarterly	Long-Term Orientation, Inner Compass, Systems Thinking
Quarterly purpose reflection dialogue	Quarterly	Inner Compass, Connectedness, Integrity
Environmental footprint review	Annually	Conscious Use of Resources, Systems Thinking, Integrity
"How we work together" dialogues	Quarterly	Self-Awareness, Communication, Relationship-Building
External perspective seeking	Quarterly or as situations arise	Openness and Learning, Humility, Connectedness
Scenario exploration sessions	Annually or for major decisions	Long-Term Orientation, Systems Thinking, Creativity

Decision process elements

These scaffolds can be built into how the team makes decisions.

Element	When to Use	IDGs Supported
Perspective mapping	Before finalising significant decisions	Perspective Skills, Inclusive Mindset, Humility
Designated challenger role	When evaluating important proposals	Critical Thinking, Courage, Systems Thinking
Values checkpoint	For decisions with ethical dimensions	Inner Compass, Integrity, Courage
Future generations perspective	For decisions with lasting consequences	Long-Term Orientation, Connectedness, Systems Thinking
Resource and environmental impact consideration	For decisions involving significant resources	Conscious Use of Resources, Systems Thinking
Stakeholder impact review	For decisions affecting others	Empathy, Systems Thinking, Connectedness

Assumption surfacing	For plans with significant uncertainty	Critical Thinking, Systems Thinking, Humility
Power dynamics analysis	For collaborative decisions with external actors	Co-Creation Skills, Inclusive Mindset, Humility
Connectedness consideration	For decisions affecting those beyond the team	Connectedness, Systems Thinking, Empathy

Communication and information practices

These scaffolds address how information flows and communication happens.

Practice	Purpose	IDGs Supported
Information sharing norms	Ensure information flows to those who need it	Communication Skills, Proactivity, Co-Creation
Constructive disagreement protocols	Make productive conflict safe and normal	Communication Skills, Courage, Critical Thinking
Genuine dialogue practices	Enable exploratory conversation for shared understanding	Communication Skills, Presence, Perspective Skills
Active listening practices	Ensure understanding before responding	Communication Skills, Empathy, Presence
Cross-boundary communication practices	Adapt communication for different contexts	Communication Skills, Inclusive Mindset, Relationship-Building
Norms for addressing harm	Establish expectations for acknowledging and repairing harm	Forgiveness, Communication Skills, Integrity

Role assignments and responsibilities

These scaffolds assign specific responsibilities to support collective capability.

Role	Responsibility	IDGs Supported
Designated challenger (rotating)	Challenge proposals constructively	Critical Thinking, Courage
Meeting facilitator (rotating)	Ensure effective meeting process	Co-Creation Skills, Inclusive Mindset
Perspective guardian	Ensure diverse views are sought	Perspective Skills, Inclusive Mindset
Time/pace keeper	Monitor meeting pace and energy	Presence, Conscious Use of Resources
Long-term thinking advocate	Raise future implications	Long-Term Orientation, Systems Thinking
Stakeholder relationship owner	Maintain key external relationships	Relationship-Building, Mobilisation Skills

Environmental impact monitor	Raise resource and environmental considerations	Conscious Use of Resources, Systems Thinking
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Team norms and working agreements

These scaffolds establish shared expectations for how the team operates.

Norm Area	Example Agreements	IDGs Supported
Psychological safety	No punishment for honest mistakes; support for vulnerability	All IDGs (foundational)
Commitment and follow-through	Do what you say; flag problems early	Integrity, Relationship-Building
Constructive disagreement	Disagree with ideas, respect people	Communication, Courage, Critical Thinking
Inclusive participation	Ensure all voices heard; notice who is silent	Inclusive Mindset, Co-Creation
Learning orientation	Treat failures as learning; share lessons	Openness and Learning, Resilience
Sustainable pace	Reasonable workload; protect recovery time	Conscious Use of Resources, Resilience
Appreciation culture	Notice and acknowledge contributions	Appreciation, Relationship-Building
Courageous voice	Speaking up about concerns is expected	Courage, Communication Skills, Integrity
External awareness	Consider effects on stakeholders, communities, environment	Connectedness, Systems Thinking, Empathy
Contribution over credit	Emphasize shared accomplishment over individual recognition	Humility, Appreciation, Relationship-Building

Appendix D: Further reading and resources

This appendix provides pointers to additional resources for those who want to deepen their understanding of the concepts and practices described in this handbook.

The Inner Development Goals framework

Inner Development Goals website: innerdevelopmentgoals.org — The official website of the IDG initiative, including the framework overview, research background, and community resources.

The 25 Skills and Qualities in the Inner Development Guide (Thomas Jordan and Claude [AI], *Perspectus skriftserie* 2025:16) — Detailed descriptions of each of the 25 IDG skills and qualities. Available at idg.thomasjordan.se.

The Inner Development Guide: From Individual to Collective Capabilities (Claude [AI], mentored by Thomas Jordan, *Perspectus skriftserie* 2025:11) — An in-depth exploration of how the 25 IDG skills and qualities can be understood and developed as properties of collectives rather than just individuals. Available at idg.thomasjordan.se.

The Sustainable Development Goals

UN Sustainable Development Goals website: sdgs.un.org — Official information on the 17 SDGs and 169 targets.

Psychological safety and team effectiveness

Edmondson, A. C. (2018). The Fearless Organisation: Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace for Learning, Innovation, and Growth. Wiley. — The definitive work on psychological safety in teams, with research evidence and practical guidance.

Edmondson, A. C. (1999). Psychological Safety and Learning Behavior in Work Teams. Administrative Science Quarterly, 44(2), 350-383. — The foundational research paper on psychological safety.

Systems thinking

Meadows, D. H. (2008). Thinking in Systems: A Primer. Chelsea Green Publishing. — An accessible introduction to systems thinking, widely regarded as the best entry point to the field.

Senge, P. M. (1990). The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organisation. Doubleday/Currency. — Classic work on organisational learning with substantial treatment of systems thinking in organisational contexts.

Retrospectives and team learning

Derby, E., & Larsen, D. (2006). Agile Retrospectives: Making Good Teams Great. Pragmatic Bookshelf. — Practical guidance on retrospective facilitation with many format variations.

The U.S. Army After Action Review process — widely adapted for organisational learning. Many resources available online describing the AAR format and variations.

Facilitation and dialogue

Schwarz, R. (2002). *The Skilled Facilitator: A Comprehensive Resource for Consultants, Facilitators, Managers, Trainers, and Coaches*. Jossey-Bass. — Comprehensive treatment of facilitation skills and group process.

Bohm, D. (2004). *On Dialogue*. Routledge. — Philosophical exploration of genuine dialogue and its role in collective thinking.

Isaacs, W. (1999). *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together*. Currency. — Practical application of dialogue principles in organisational settings.

Communication and conflict

Rosenberg, M. B. (2015). *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life (3rd ed.)*. Puddle-Dancer Press. — Influential approach to honest, empathic communication.

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Kegan, R. (1994). *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life*. Harvard University Press. — Accessible introduction to adult developmental theory.

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Note: This list provides starting points for deeper exploration. Many additional resources exist for each topic area. The works cited here are generally accessible to practitioners without specialized academic background.