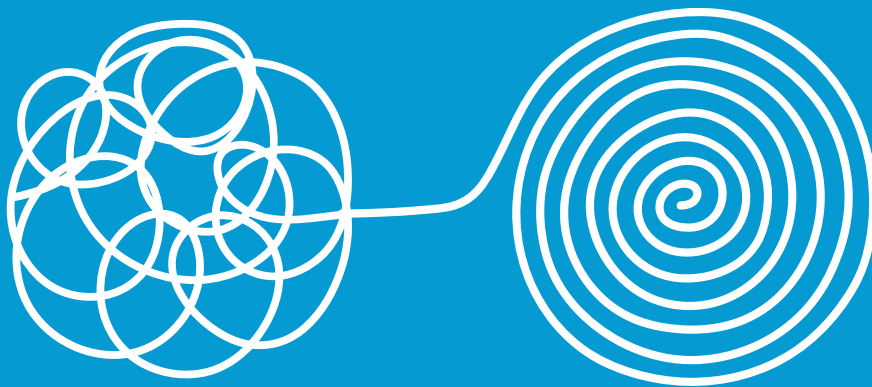


Navigating Uncertainty

A Workbook for Dialogue and Peer Consultation



Navigating Uncertainty: A dialogue model to navigate uncertainty towards better solutions for sustainability challenges

A Workbook

Updated 04.05.2026

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Is this dialogue model for me?	

Are you deeply moved by a sustainability challenge in your professional or personal surroundings, characterized by uncertainties and conflicting interests? Are you ready to invest time and effort to tackle them, but need guidance to figure out how to overcome barriers to cooperation with others, identify root causes of the challenge, and uncover new opportunities for action? Do you feel ready to **move from 'thinking alone' to 'thinking together'** along key questions like “Where are we now? Where do we want to go? What are the leverage points for interventions? And what could a possible process look like?”?

What if we, as a global community of individuals and organizations committed to sustainability, embraced a dialogue model that sees diversity as a strength? One that values inclusivity, collaboration, and co-creation as essential for tackling complex challenges? From our experience, working with diverse groups of practitioners and decision-makers, many of us lack the skills to facilitate truly inclusive learning and co-creation processes. We also have busy schedules and little time for extra activities. We are convinced that practitioners, decision-makers, and anyone passionate about sustainability would benefit from a **low-barrier dialogue model supported by clear guidance without requiring extensive training**.

This flexible and accessible dialogue model is designed to help challenge holders navigate uncertainty. It incorporates a **systemic perspective and the broader context of the challenge, providing a holistic understanding** of the involved stakeholders and their relationships - a prerequisite for building trust and shared understanding. This enables a challenge holder and their coaches to co-create solutions tailored to their specific needs, while introducing practical tools that can be applied immediately. It's not just a problem-understanding and solving approach - **it builds capacity for collaborative and effective action**, equipping participants to navigate complexity and uncertainty.

Unlike rigid frameworks, this model offers a **structured yet flexible and iterative approach**. It is scalable to fit a variety of challenges and adaptable to different contexts, supporting rapid yet thoughtful decision-making. The model emphasizes a pragmatic approach: **solutions don't need to be perfect to start**. By encouraging action based on "**good enough to start**" insights, it helps avoid the pitfalls of over-analysis and inertia.

Applications and use cases

The model is particularly suitable for:

- Facilitating **innovation on sustainability challenges** at the local, regional, and international levels.
- Encouraging **collaborative peer learning**.
- Encouraging **contributions from individuals (coaches)** even if they do not have deep expertise in the particular field, but may bring fresh perspectives and creativity to the case.
- Identifying **leverage points for action** and co-developing solutions that differ from currently predominant ones.

The dialogue model can be applied to **use cases** that are current, concrete, and important, and in which you are a key player or decision maker. These challenges align with the pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and particularly with SDG 17, “Partnerships for the Goals,” which aims to strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize global partnerships for sustainable development. They may target one of these or similar impact areas:



Limitations to consider

While this model offers flexibility and inclusivity, it is not without its limitations:

- **Dependence on participant engagement:** The process relies heavily on active and meaningful contributions from participants. If participants are disengaged or lack diversity, the outcomes may be limited.
- **Expertise vs. fresh and unexpected perspectives:** While the model values diverse perspectives, some challenges may require a higher degree of technical expertise than what is typically encouraged within this framework. Balancing the need for expertise and creative input may be challenging. Here, appreciation for the characteristics of this approach, as outlined above, will avoid disappointments.
- **Time investment:** Time and skills to build mutual trust are very important. So, if no time is invested in the process, there could be a big limitation to its success.
- **Risk of ambiguity:** Flexibility can lead to uncertainty about the process itself, especially for groups that prefer more structured and directive approaches.
- **Scalability challenges:** While the model is designed to be scalable, larger or more complex challenges leading to longer collaboration processes may require significant adaptation, more comprehensive tools, and additional resources to ensure its effectiveness.

How much time is required?

The application of the dialogue model is intentionally flexible to accommodate different contexts. It can range from a one-time 2-hour online session focused on a single case and tool to a three-day in-person workshop or a series of 3 to 4 online meetings spread over several weeks. The exact format depends on the type of challenge, the participants' availability, and the possibility of meeting in person. A shorter timeframe helps keep the process focused and prevents it from stalling. If participants remain actively engaged, the dialogue process can naturally be extended.

I Background

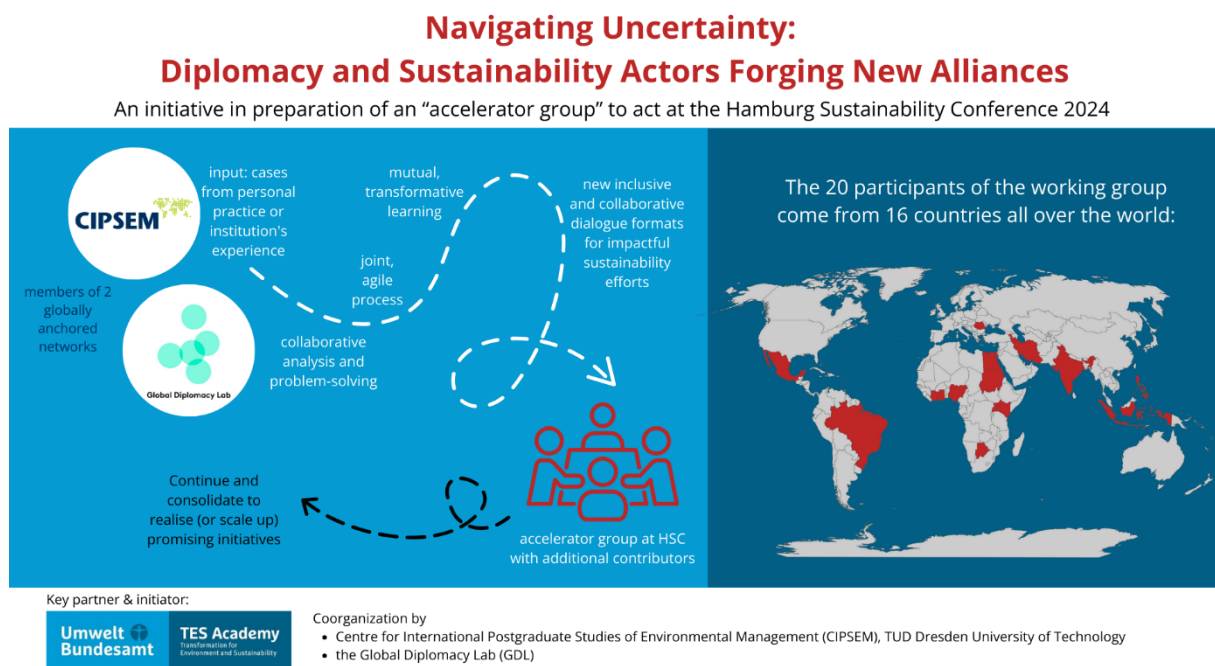
Why and how did we develop the dialogue model?

In today's VUCA¹ world, marked by polycrises and conflicting interests, many sustainability challenges at local, regional, and global levels require urgent solutions. The growing divergence among actors, compounded by the interplay of multiple crises, poses significant challenges to cooperation in addressing environmental protection, sustainability, and shared prosperity.

"A key question that motivates me to get involved is the issue of trust building and cooperation. In my experience, most alliance-building initiatives focus primarily on the technical outcomes of partnerships. In this fragile world filled with polycrises, the idea of trust building is a key driver of sustainability for me."
(statement of one of the first participants)

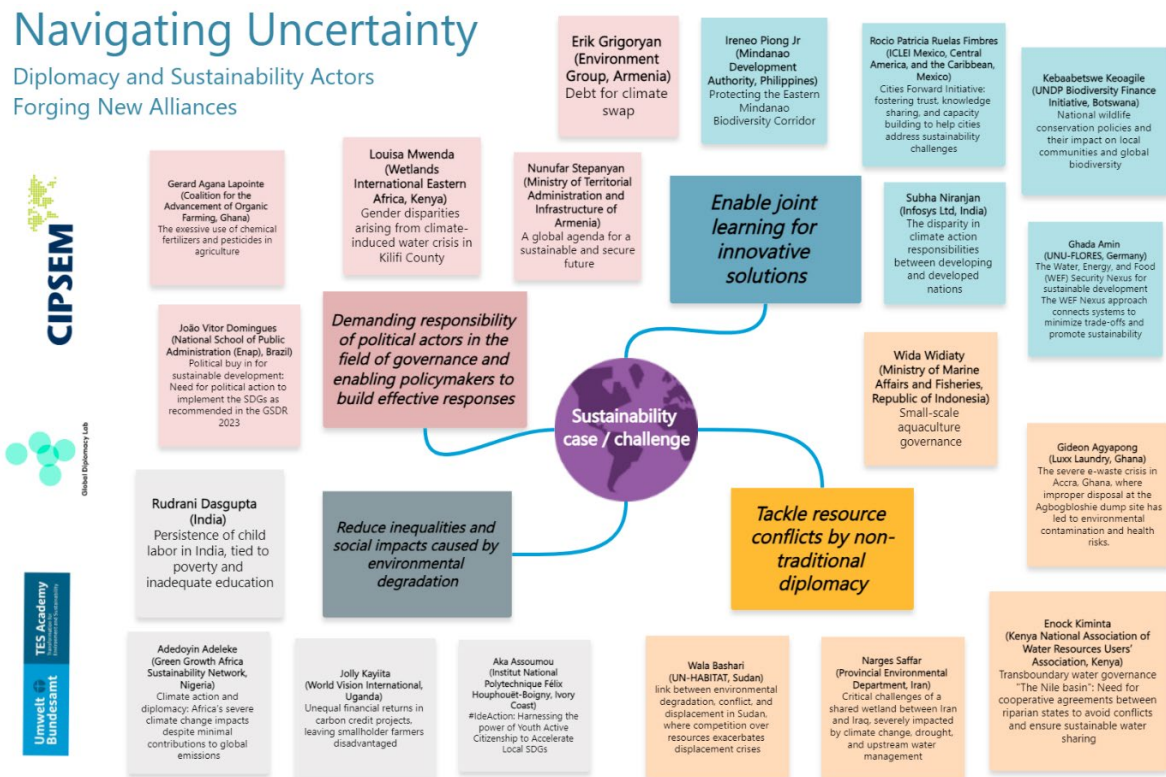
By embracing diverse perspectives and allowing space for critical interpersonal dynamics and novel interventions, the dialogue model aims to foster new alliances to build trust and cooperation, ultimately contributing to robust global sustainability policies.

The approach is grounded in the outcomes of the collaborative process "Navigating Uncertainty: Diplomacy and Sustainability Actors Forging New Alliances," conducted in preparation for the Hamburg Sustainability Conference 2024. This initiative brought together 20 experts from 16 countries across Africa, Asia, and Latin America, forming a vibrant and diverse community of practice. The TES Academy at the German Environment Agency (UBA), the Centre for International Postgraduate Studies of Environmental Management (CIPSEM) at TUD Dresden University of Technology, and the Global Diplomacy Lab (GDL) jointly facilitated this process of developing and refining the dialog model.



¹ VUCA = volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity

Exemplary case studies from this initial process proposed by the participants underpin the development of the dialogue model. These real-world cases, proposed and presented by the participants, reflect current, concrete challenges in our uncertain world. They illustrate the “space of possibilities” where the dialogue model can be effectively applied to uncover innovative solutions:



Key insights from the development of the dialogue model are:

- **Unlocking innovation through collaboration:** Collaborative efforts among a diverse range of (international) actors can lead to innovative interventions that effectively address complex challenges at local, regional, and global levels.
- **Revealing novel opportunities:** By engaging a diverse group of stakeholders, the dialogue model uncovers new actors and solutions, paving the way for fresh patterns of cooperation and collective action.
- **Balancing local and global perspectives:** The process highlights the critical need to understand local and personal realities while maintaining a global perspective, which fosters effective cooperation across borders and sectors.

Key long-term goals of using the dialogue model include:

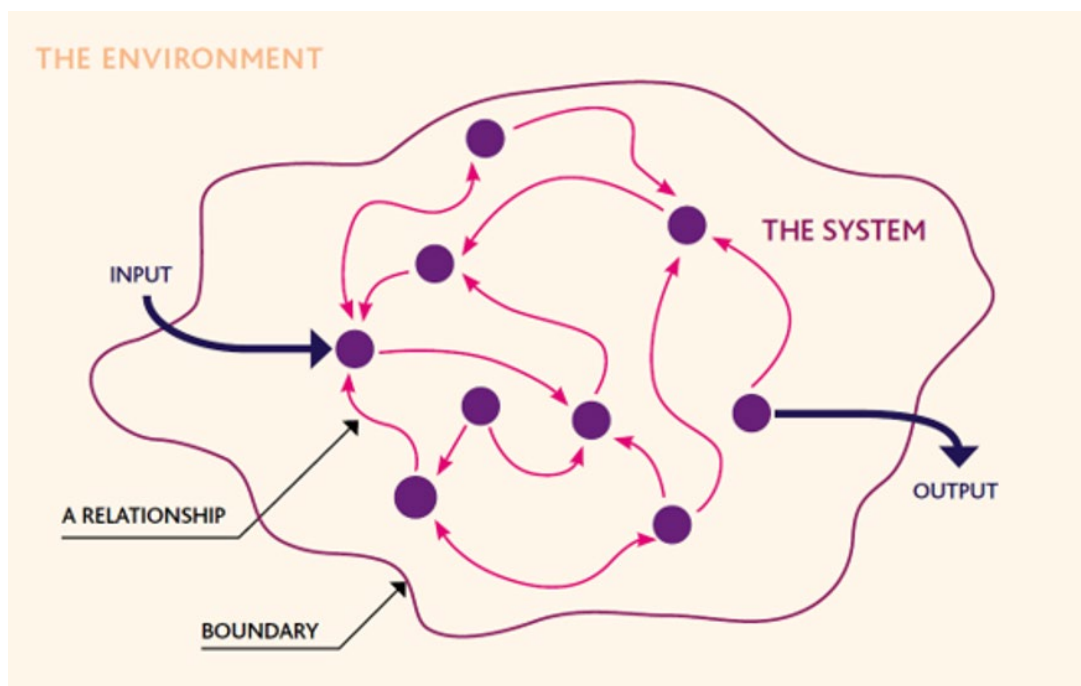
- **Establishing platforms for dialogue:** Initiating platforms and alliances that facilitate constructive and inclusive dialogue, enabling stakeholders to share needs, perspectives, and best practices while inspiring collective action.
- **Promoting joint initiatives:** Encouraging joint initiatives and collaborative mechanisms that leverage diverse expertise and resources, enhancing international cooperation for sustainable development.
- **Building lasting relationships:** Emphasizing the importance of cultivating long-term relationships based on trust, shared values, and common sustainability goals, ensuring a collaborative foundation for future efforts.

The systemic view and the theory of change of the dialogue model

In this section, we describe the systemic lens that underpins the dialogue model. We introduce key concepts and tools that support a systemic understanding of sustainability challenges and explain how this perspective shapes our theory of change. These insights are not just theoretical: they helped us design and test the model in ways that encourage deep reflection, identify root causes, and enable collaboration across boundaries. By building on existing tools and frameworks, we aim to offer a practical approach to systemic change.

Why take a systemic view?

To address sustainability challenges, especially under conditions of uncertainty, a **systemic perspective** is essential. It helps uncover interdependencies, power dynamics, and underlying patterns that often remain hidden when only symptoms are addressed. A system can be defined as a set of interrelated elements — such as actors and social, cultural, economic, political, and biophysical conditions — and the relationships and dynamics between them. These elements “[...] constitute a whole, like a business, community, a society, a nation, a region, the world as a whole, or an ecosystem.”² “**Stakeholders** [in such a system] are people or institutions that have an interest in a particular course of development, or a particular decision, either as individuals or as representatives of a group. This includes people who influence a decision, who are key players in implementation, or who are affected by the development.”³



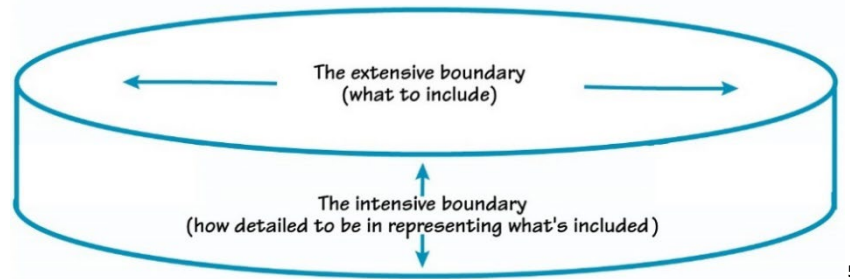
² Collective Leadership Institute (CLI): Diagnosing a Stakeholder System, Factsheet 15, p.2, Download: https://compass-tool.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Factsheet_15_DiagnosingSystemsPatterns_final.pdf

³ ibid.

⁴ Rob Abercrombie, Ellen Harries and Rachel Wharton: Systems change: A guide to what it is and how to do it. New Philanthropy Capital (NPC) (June 2015), Download: [Systems change: A guide to what it is and how to do it - NPC \(thinknpc.org\)](https://www.thinknpc.org/systems-change-a-guide-to-what-it-is-and-how-to-do-it)

Our approach: Exploring through expanding system boundaries

We support the development of a systemic view in two complementary ways:



The dialogue tools introduced in Part III were selected based on their ability to support these two types of boundary expansion.

Expanding the extensive boundaries zooms out from the immediate case to consider broader patterns. Coaches are encouraged to share relevant experiences, lessons from other fields, or similar cases from different contexts. This helps identify external factors and trends, such as ‘economic relations’, ‘resources for action’, or ‘geopolitical tensions’, that shape the challenge and reveal systemic patterns.

Expanding the intensive boundaries delves deeper into the system's internal layers to understand what lies beneath visible events. Tools such as the Iceberg Model and actor/stakeholder mapping help examine underlying mindsets, relationships, power structures, and institutional dynamics. These tools help shift the focus from surface-level issues to the root causes that must be addressed for lasting change.

Guiding questions

To help challenge holders and coaches orient their analysis, we work with the following guiding questions drawn from systems thinking and transformation practice:

- What systemic patterns impact the success of initiatives, which are critical for identifying key strategies, designing effective process architectures, and making collaboration work?
- Which actors are missing from the conversation?
- Which (different) approaches and specific competencies do actors bring, and what is needed to build new alliances?
- What are the blind spots and missing links?
- How do differences influence (political) behavior?
- What common practices exist, and how might they be applied to the case?
- How can conflicts be addressed to overcome them?
- How could a new “normal” look like - a preferred future beyond current constraints?

From understanding to intervention: Identifying leverage points

Once a systemic view is developed, the next step is to identify leverage points — “... places within a complex system (a corporation, an economy, a living body, a city, an ecosystem), where a small shift

⁵ The Systems Thinker (<https://thesystemsthinker.com/the-thinking-in-systems-thinking-how-can-we-make-it-easier-to-master/>)

in one thing can produce big changes in everything.”⁶ At this stage, the focus is on uncovering and leveraging small, strategic shifts that can create ripple effects throughout the system. To achieve such effects

- **negative patterns** such as conflicting interests or rigid mental models that block change, as well as
- **positive patterns** such as common interests or shared values, which could be strengthened to amplify impact,

can be addressed. This shift from understanding to intervention is at the heart of the dialogue model. By supporting participants in diagnosing the system and identifying leverage points collaboratively, the model lays the groundwork for the acceleration and stabilization phases of system change.

The core principles and envisaged outcomes of the dialogue model

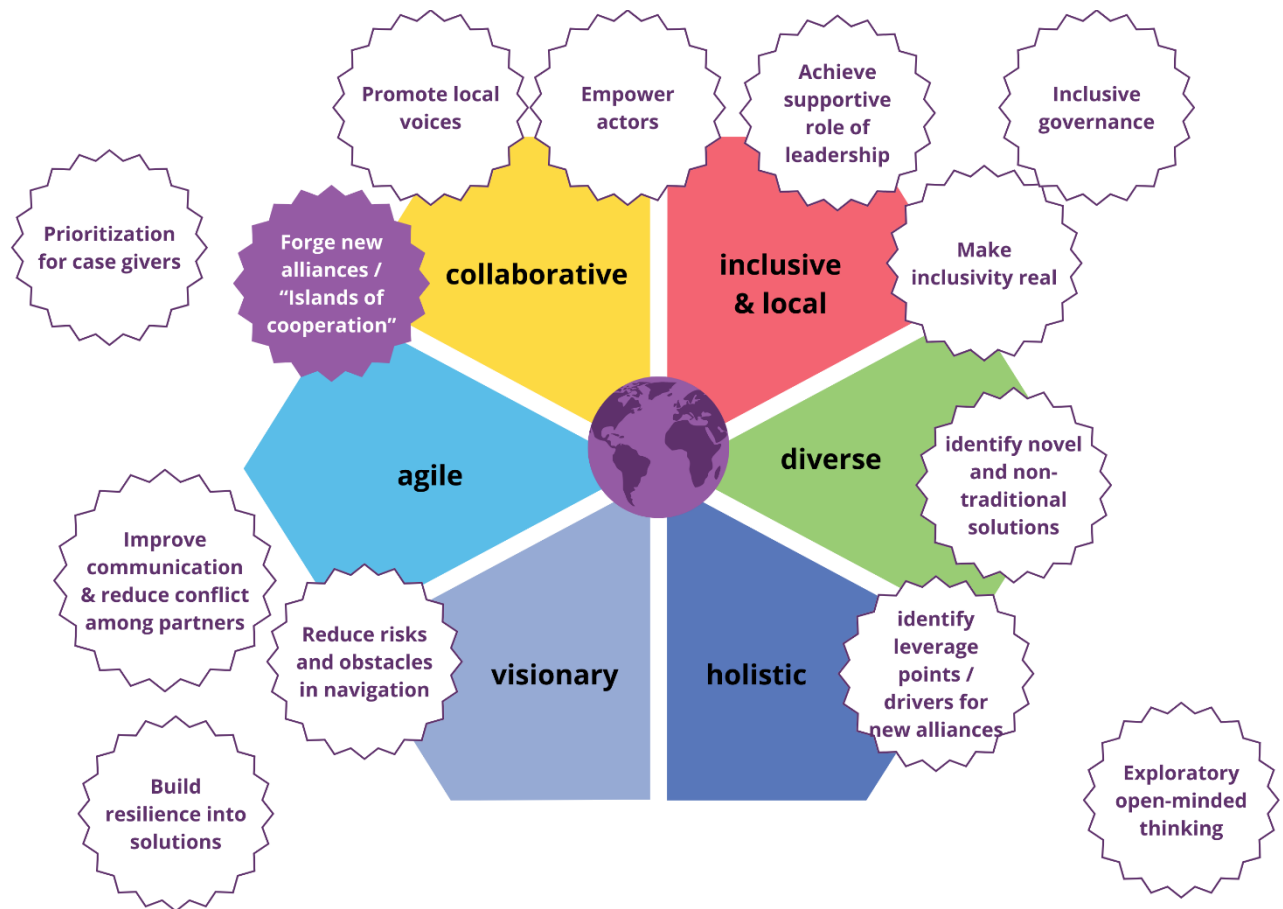
To navigate complexity and build trust across diverse groups, dialogue must go beyond sharing opinions — it requires an intentional mindset. During the co-development of the dialogue model, participants identified a set of **core principles** on how to design and start a collaborative process. They formulated the following **questions to frame the attitudes** for the process and its steps:



These dimensions and questions are relevant for the selection of appropriate tools for concrete activities.

⁶ See D.H.Meadows (1999): Leverage Points: Places to Intervene in a System. The Sustainability Institute. p.1. (<https://donellameadows.org/archives/leverage-points-places-to-intervene-in-a-system/>)

The experience from the development of the dialogue model shows that these core principles are also the foundation for achieving the following **envisioned outcomes** of a collaborative process:

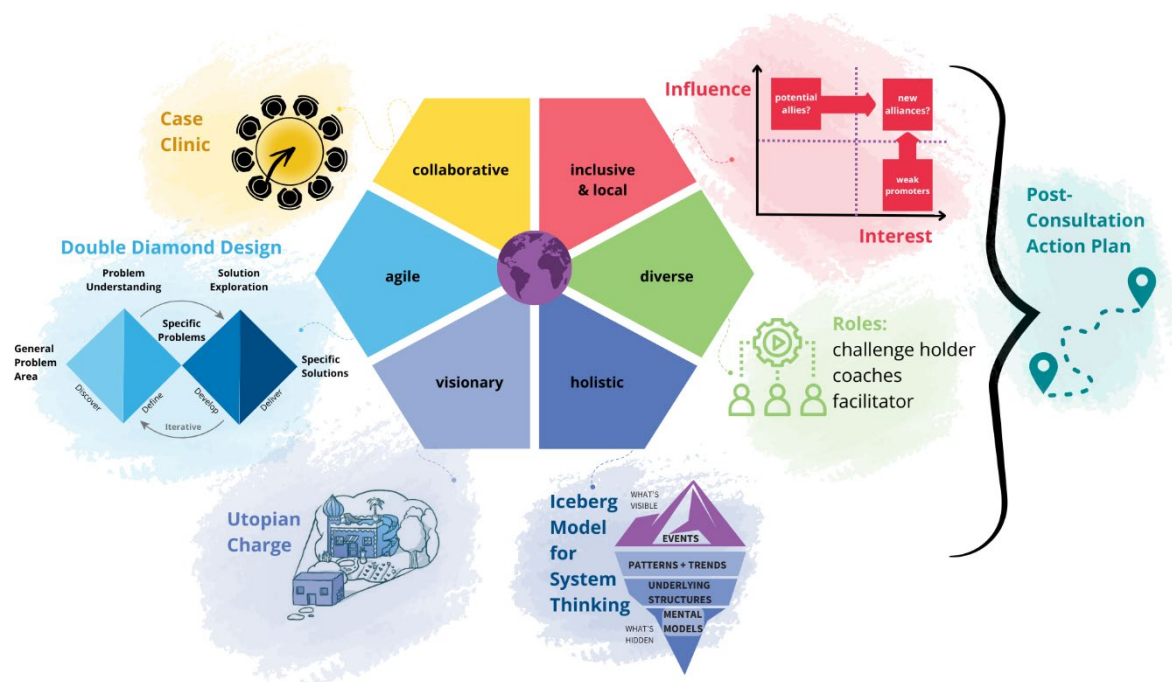


Of course, there are more potential outcomes achievable depending on a specific case. **Don't forget, the approach is flexible, iterative, and adaptive to your needs!**

The tools at a glance

We compiled a toolbox to support users of the dialogue model in putting systemic thinking and co-creative solution development into practice. The tools we included were selected, tested, and - where needed - adapted from existing approaches developed by leading institutions and communities in the fields of systems thinking, transformative learning, and stakeholder collaboration. Our intention was not to "reinvent the wheel" but to build on the powerful tools already available and organize them in a way that fits the logic and values of our dialogue model.

The toolbox is your assistant in planning collaborative sessions around your sustainability challenge. It provides structure without being rigid. Each tool supports a specific dimension of the dialogue process and highlights a distinct set of guiding questions. To make the tools easier to navigate, we introduced color coding. Each dimension of the dialogue model is assigned a color to help you see which tools support which part of the process. In Part III, we walk you through each tool in more detail. For now, here is an overview of the tools included in the toolbox and the purpose they serve.



Want to go further?

The toolbox presented here is an entry point. If you want to explore systems change and transformation more deeply, or if your case requires more strategic approaches and frameworks. We recommend the following resources:

Ecosystem Cards⁷

A freely available comprehensive tool set to support individuals, teams, organizations, and networks to explore the potentials and implications of adopting an ecosystem approach and define pathways to engage with ecosystems.

Collective Leadership Compass⁸ and the Dialogic Change Model⁹

Meta-level guiding structures to assess, plan, and enact collaborative change, developed by the Collective Leadership Institute (CLI) to navigate complex challenges.

Theory U¹⁰

An awareness-based method and framework for changing systems, the result of the work of Otto Scharmer at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), which blends systems thinking, innovation, and leading change, from the viewpoint of an evolving human consciousness.

⁷ <https://ecosystem.cards/>

⁸ <https://www.collectiveleadership.de/blog/article/the-collective-leadership-compass/>

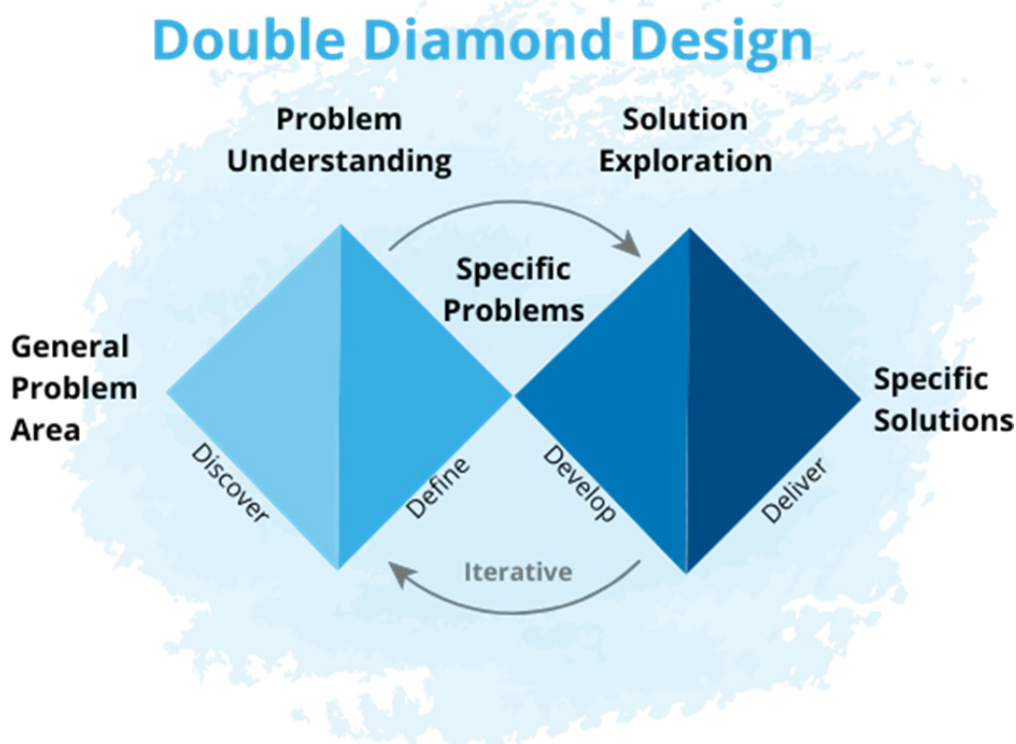
⁹ <https://www.collectiveleadership.de/blog/article/the-dialogic-change-model/>

¹⁰ <https://www.u-school.org/theory-u>

II Workbook: How can I start?

The Double Diamond model as a process framework

You may already have your own approach to collaboration. In this workbook, we introduce a modular, iterative process that helped us navigate uncertainty and complexity — and we invite you to explore how it might support your own case. The starting point is a sustainability challenge - the specific case in which you or another person is involved. The Double Diamond model¹¹ can serve as a basic framework for this process, constantly inspiring contributors to share their experiences and synthesize their findings as a group. Regardless of the tools used, this model provides a simple way to structure the collaborative process:



The diamonds represent the phases of exploring an issue broadly or deeply (divergent thinking) and then moving towards focused action (convergent thinking). The Double Diamond can be applied to:

- **Question** the challenge you are facing,
- **Manage** the design and innovation process, set milestones and organise the collaboration,
- **Select and sequence** activities and methods,
- **Review, evaluate, and refine** a solution once it has been delivered.

Its principles make the Double Diamond a perfect process framework for the dialogue model:¹²

- **Put people first.** Start with an understanding of the stakeholders of a case, their needs, strengths and aspirations.
- **Communicate visually and inclusively.** Help people gain a shared understanding of the problem and ideas.

¹¹ The Double Diamond was published by the UK's Design Council in 2004 as a way to distill and communicate the design process to non-designers. See also <https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/our-resources/the-double-diamond/>

¹² <https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/our-resources/framework-for-innovation/>

- **Collaborate and co-create.** Work together and get inspired by what others are doing.
- **Iterate, iterate, iterate.** Do this to catch mistakes early, avoid risks and build confidence in your ideas.

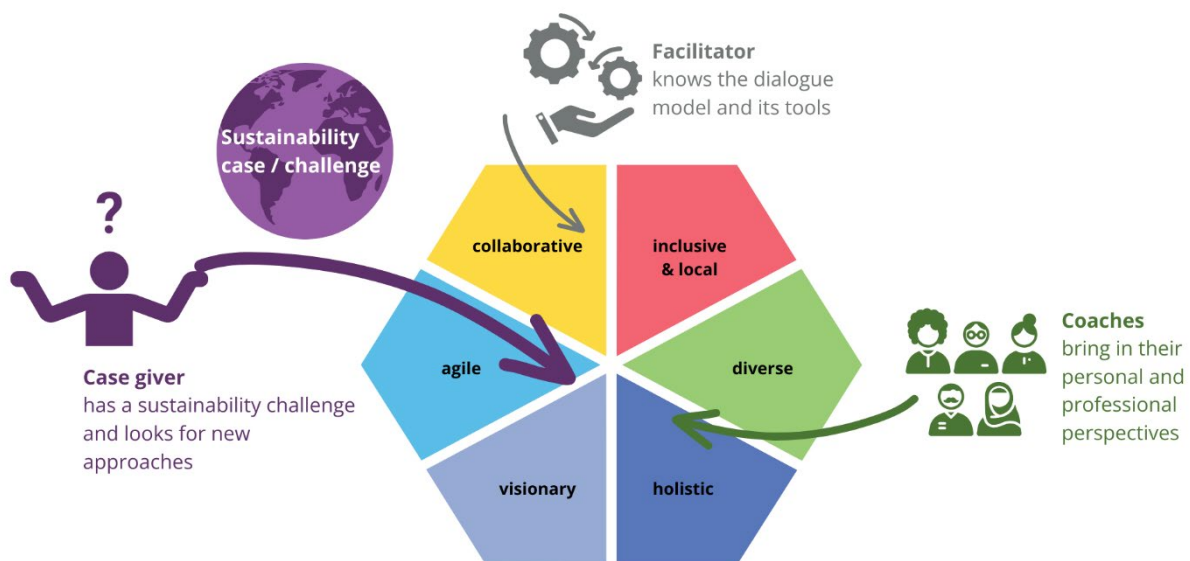
Roles to apply the dialogue model and form a group

To create a coaching process around a concrete case and apply the tools in an agile, inclusive and collaborative way, roles and responsibilities need to be clarified as follows:

The Challenge holder initiates the process and represents the sustainability case. Ideally, they are a key player or decision maker in the case. They bring relevance to the process and are open to questioning their own assumptions and embracing new perspectives.

The Facilitator is familiar with the dialogue model and its tools or is willing to learn through practice. Their **role** is to guide the group neutrally through the process and its meetings in cooperation with the challenge holder. They do not do all the work, but plan, organise, and facilitate the meetings.

The Coaches form a diverse group of **engaged individuals** who bring valuable personal and professional perspectives, even without being technical experts in the issue at hand. Many coaches have their own sustainability challenges (e.g., in other regions) and will benefit from cross-learning while contributing.



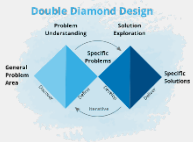
Benefits contributors can expect

Ideally, identifying solution pathways together allows all parties to learn valuable lessons for their work. In particular, benefits could be

- **Access to collective intelligence:** By engaging in the dialogue model and its core principles, the challenge holder can leverage the knowledge and expertise of diverse participants to develop innovative solutions.
- **Strengthened networks for all participants:** Collaborative efforts help build relationships with other professionals, fostering new alliances and partnerships.
- **Enhanced capacity:** All participants can gain new skills and insights that enhance their ability to navigate and address sustainability challenges effectively.

Create your process!

With the Double Diamond as a flexible process framework and the dialogue model as your guiding mindset, you can now begin shaping your own pathway. The following steps translate the dialogue model into action. Select the elements and tools that best support your specific case and context. Use the table below to sketch your own process. The tools listed will be explained in [Part III](#).

 Process step	Purpose / Intention	Suitable tools <i>These tools are explained in more detail later (page 18 ff).</i>
Case description	<u>Self-reflection prior to the initial meeting:</u> 1) Current situation: What key challenge or question are you up against, and what is your role in it? 2) Stakeholders: Who is involved, and how might others view this situation? 3) Intention: What future are you trying to create? In other words, what is your personal challenge in this case? 4) Relevance: What is the local and global relevance of your case? 5) Learning threshold: What do you need to let go of, and what do you need to learn? 6) Help: Where do you need input or help?	A one-page concept note answering the questions
Group formation	Find and form a diverse group of engaged individuals as coaches who bring valuable perspectives, even if they are not technical experts on the sustainability issue. Find a facilitator and plan the initial meeting jointly.	- Call/invitation Guideline on how to plan a meeting
Discover 1 	Understand <u>the system, the main challenge, and the uncertainties</u> of the case. Expand the extensive boundaries of the system to enrich the case.	Case clinic - Alternative: PESTEL analysis
Discover 2 	Identify <u>“hidden” aspects</u> like conflicting interests, hidden patterns and dynamics, and beliefs.	Iceberg model
Discover 3 	Develop a strategic view of the <u>power imbalances</u> and <u>of the willingness of human and institutional actors</u> to engage in change around a particular issue.	Influence-interest grid (step 1)

Define 1 	Reflect on how your <u>understanding of your case</u> has changed.	• Post-Consultation Self-Assessment
Define 2 	Reflect on surprising discoveries, <u>leverage points</u> (e.g., common interests, diversity benefits), and obstacles.	• Post-Consultation Direction-Setting
Develop 1 	Imagine a <u>preferable future</u> for the challenge and activate a future-oriented mind.	• Utopian charge exercise • <i>Alternative: Setting emotionally compelling goals (to be added in a future version)</i>
[Develop ...]  <i>to be added in a future version</i>	<i>Explore the possible future</i>	• <i>Foresight methods (e.g., Futures wheel, Three horizons)</i>
Develop 2 	Identify potential allies and weak promoters and analyze how to engage different stakeholders to <u>establish new alliances</u> towards the preferable future.	• Influence-interest grid (step 2)
Deliver 1 	Align your available resources with your goals and ambitions and <u>develop a Theory of Change</u> that is simple and intuitive.	• Impact Garden
Deliver 2 	Draft the <u>first concrete steps</u> you plan to take regarding your case. Identify actions based on the findings and inspiration from the process.	• Post-Consultation Action Plan

How to structure agendas of the kick-off and following meetings

The previous section outlined the key steps of the dialogue process — from understanding the case to identifying leverage points and co-creating action. Every process begins with a **kick-off meeting**. This first gathering plays a crucial role: it helps build trust, clarify intentions, and establish a shared understanding of the challenge and the group constellation. Sometimes, one well-prepared meeting may be enough to spark new ideas and momentum. Other times, it may reveal that the group needs more time to build common ground or motivation to continue. Both outcomes are valuable.

To design meaningful meetings, it helps to use a simple yet flexible structure. One source of inspiration for this is the **Berlin Model** — a planning framework from adult education that helps structure learning sessions around key elements like objectives, content, methods, and resources¹³. We reference it here because it provides a helpful framework for thinking through the **core elements of a session**: objectives, content, methods, and available resources. Its core principle — *form follows function* — reminds us that meetings should be designed intentionally to support their purpose, not just follow a format for its own sake.

We encourage facilitators to use the following table as a customizable **template** for preparing their meetings. It offers a structure that combines clarity of purpose with the flexibility needed to adapt to a group's specific needs.

Time	Goal / Intention	Content / Key Message	Tool for interaction	Preparation remarks
Beginning	#Check-In			
Working Phase	#Getting Things Done			
Closing	#Check-Out			

Facilitator tip: Don't worry about having all the answers. Your role is to create structure and space for dialogue - not to control the entire process. Invite the group to co-create the agenda and take shared ownership of the outcomes. **Trust the collective intelligence in the room!**

¹³ See "Facilitating Transdisciplinary Research Group Meetings – A Workbook" (<https://www.iac-berlin.org/assets/downloads/2025-Facilitating-Transdisciplinary-Research-Group-Meetings-Workbook.pdf>)

Recommended principles of “being together” to be shared with the participants¹⁴

To support constructive group dynamics, we recommend sharing the following principles with all participants at the outset:



Every voice counts



No one holds the whole truth



Listen to understand



Collective ownership



To agree on disagreement



Be present and connected



To have a beginner's mindset



Keep gadgets silent

¹⁴ Source: Ruslan Kildeev / resense 360

From consultation to action

To support your continued dialogue planning and the development of meaningful actions and interventions, it is helpful to reflect on and document the key lessons learned. To assist you in this process, three simple templates are provided in the toolbox:

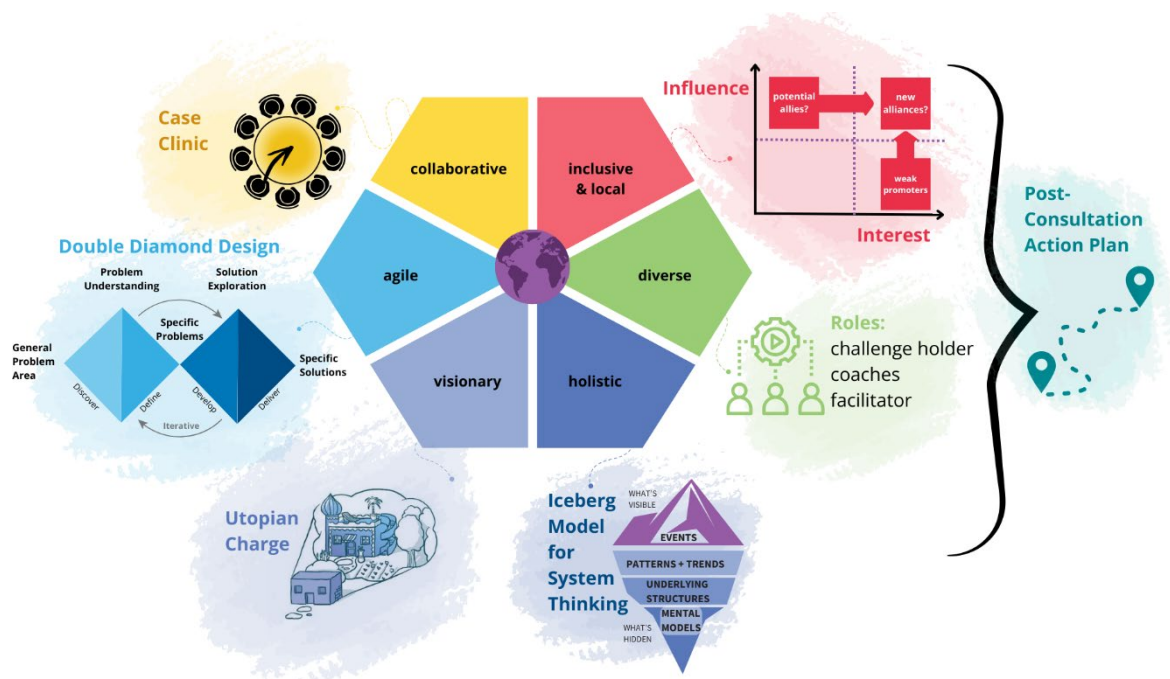
Navigating Uncertainty Post-Consultation Self-Assessment After you have received input from your coaches in the case clinic and other tools, use this worksheet to reflect on your lessons learned and extended understanding of your case. 	Navigating Uncertainty Post-Consultation Direction Setting If you want to go towards preparing an action plan, this worksheet might be helpful to determine your direction. 	Navigating Uncertainty Post-Consultation Action Plan This worksheet can help you to draft the first concrete steps toward achieving your goal. 
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As with all the tools in this workbook, feel free to adapt them to your individual or group needs - or replace them with other methods you find more useful.

III The tools in detail: their intention and application

The following tool descriptions are intended as brief spotlights rather than exhaustive manuals. Each tool has been developed and documented by others and is already well-explained in its original source(s). Rather than duplicating this information, we provide links to those resources for deeper exploration.

What we offer here is our perspective on why we include each tool in this dialogue model: the intention behind its use and how it supports different steps in the collaborative process. This can help you decide when and how to apply each tool in your own context and choose the most appropriate ones for your challenge.



Case Clinic

Overview

Case Clinic is a peer coaching process designed to identify innovative solutions and next steps for addressing pressing leadership challenges. In this structured dialogue, a case giver presents a real, current challenge while peers act as coaches, offering diverse perspectives without giving direct advice. The process creates space for collaborative problem-solving by expanding the case giver's understanding through questions, reflections, and shared experiences. Developed by the Presencing Institute as part of the Theory U methodology, the Case Clinic has become widely used in organisational development, social innovation, and sustainability work for its ability to unlock fresh insights through collective intelligence.



Why use this tool in the dialogue model?

Case Clinic extends system boundaries by examining challenges and uncertainties from multiple viewpoints. Many committed individuals struggle to find solutions independently, making this peer coaching vital for overcoming individual limitations. The structured format encourages sharing perspectives on the challenge, enabling case givers to assimilate ideas and discover innovative solutions for urgent issues. In sustainability contexts, this tool enhances understanding by connecting diverse expertise and experiences, challenging assumptions, and introducing fresh perspectives across sectors and disciplines. It builds collaborative capacity and generates actionable insights that individual reflection alone cannot.

How to use the tool

- The process involves 4-6 participants over 60-90 minutes. The case giver presents their challenge (10-15 minutes), detailing the current situation and specific questions. Coaches then ask clarifying questions (10-15 minutes) to deepen understanding without providing solutions.
- In the consultation phase (20-30 minutes), coaches discuss the case as if the case giver isn't present, sharing insights and experiences while the case giver listens. Finally, the case giver reflects on the discussion (10-15 minutes) and identifies key insights and next steps.
- Critical rule: Coaches avoid giving direct advice, instead offering observations, questions, and parallel experiences.

Outcomes and insights

Case Clinic often leads to breakthrough moments, revealing assumptions and mental models that limit solution-finding. It highlights overlooked resources or allies and builds empathy among participants, fostering stronger networks for future collaboration. Case givers frequently realize their challenges are linked to broader systemic issues, paving the way for strategic interventions and long-lasting solutions.

Sources and licensing

Presencing Institute / u-school: <https://www.u-school.org/case-clinic> (freely available for educational use)

Alternative to the Case Clinic: PESTEL analysis

Overview

PESTEL analysis is a strategic framework for examining external factors that influence an organization, project, or challenge. The acronym stands for Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental, and Legal factors. This systematic scanning tool helps identify macro-environmental influences that shape the context in which sustainability challenges operate. By categorizing external forces into these six dimensions, PESTEL analysis provides a structured approach to environmental scanning that reveals opportunities, threats, and systemic patterns often overlooked when focusing solely on immediate issues.

Why use this tool in the dialogue model?

PESTEL analysis expands extensive system boundaries by examining external forces that shape sustainability challenges beyond their immediate context. To enrich the case, the factors used in the PESTEL analysis tool can help foster discussions within the framework of a case clinic. Many practitioners focus narrowly on technical or local aspects of their challenges, missing crucial influences that determine the success or failure of interventions. This tool enables diverse groups to collectively map the broader landscape, revealing how external trends intersect to create both constraints and opportunities. In sustainability work, PESTEL analysis helps identify systemic interventions by uncovering trends that could amplify impact or create new pathways for action.

How to use the tool

Begin by clearly defining the challenge or system you're analyzing. Then explore each dimension through collaborative discussion. Encourage participants to share relevant examples from their diverse backgrounds, noting interconnections between categories.

Outcomes and insights

PESTEL analysis often reveals hidden systemic patterns and external forces that significantly influence the sustainability challenge but were previously unrecognized. It helps identify novel opportunities arising from emerging trends and highlights potential allies or resources that exist beyond the immediate system. The tool frequently uncovers timing considerations and enables more strategic thinking about leverage points and longer-lasting solutions that account for broader environmental realities.

Sources and licensing

Originally developed by Harvard professor Francis J. Aguilar in 1967 as ETPS in his book "Scanning the Business Environment". The framework later evolved to include Legal and Environmental factors, becoming PESTEL. The basic framework is in the public domain and widely available through numerous business and strategy resources, including

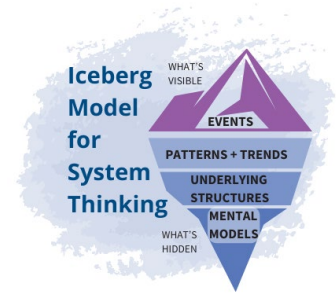
<https://pestleanalysis.com/what-is-pestle-analysis/>.

Educational and non-commercial use is generally unrestricted.

Iceberg model

Overview

The Iceberg Model reveals hidden structures beneath visible events and symptoms. Like an iceberg, where most of the mass lies below the surface, the majority of the factors driving complex challenges are invisible. The model helps participants move beyond reactive problem-solving by exploring four levels: events (what happened), patterns (recurring trends), structures (rules, policies, physical elements), and mental models (beliefs, assumptions, paradigms). Originally developed in systems thinking practice, it has been adapted by organizations, including the Presencing Institute and Mutomorro, for organizational development and sustainability work.



Why use this tool in the dialogue model?

The Iceberg Model expands intensive system boundaries, helping participants shift from symptom management to transformative intervention at deeper levels. It surfaces blind spots and systemic patterns that keep communities stuck in reproducing unwanted results. For sustainability challenges, this tool moves participants beyond immediate crises to understand underlying drivers like institutional cultures, power dynamics, or worldviews perpetuating unsustainable practices. By revealing deeper layers, it opens space for longer-lasting solutions that address root causes and support shared understanding among diverse stakeholders.

How to use the tool

Present the iceberg visual to participants (3-7 people). Start with a defined challenge, then work through each level:

- **Events:** What specific incidents are we experiencing?
- **Patterns:** What trends repeat over time?
- **Structures:** What policies or arrangements contribute to these patterns?
- **Mental Models:** What beliefs sustain these structures?

Use sticky notes or online tools to capture insights. Encourage "What's not being said?" questions. Process takes 45-90 minutes. Consider follow-up about which level offers most leverage for intervention.

Outcomes and insights

The Iceberg Model reveals connections between surface problems and deeper systemic issues, explaining why previous solutions failed to create lasting change. It builds shared language across perspectives and uncovers misalignments between stated values and actual structures. By making invisible dynamics visible, participants identify leverage points for strategic action and develop interventions addressing multiple levels simultaneously, increasing likelihood of sustainable transformation.

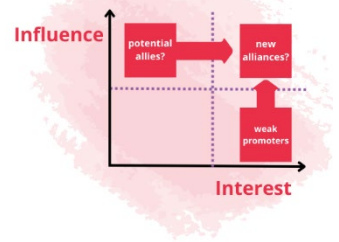
Sources and licensing

- Presencing Institute: <https://www.u-school.org/icebergdiagnostic> (freely available for educational use)
- Mutomorro: <https://mutomorro.com/iceberg-model> (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

Influence-interest grid

Overview

The influence-interest grid is a stakeholder analysis tool that maps individuals and groups based on their level of influence (power to affect outcomes) and their level of interest in a particular issue or change. This two-dimensional matrix creates four quadrants that help categorize stakeholders: high influence/high interest, high influence/low interest, low influence/high interest, and low influence/low interest. The grid provides a visual framework for understanding stakeholder dynamics and developing targeted engagement strategies. By plotting stakeholders across these dimensions, users can identify key relationships, potential allies, and strategic priorities for building support and managing resistance to change initiatives.



Why use this tool in the dialogue model?

When pursuing change, it is critical to understand which interest groups may be affected and which need to be actively involved. This is especially important when incorporating the views and interests of stakeholders who may not have been engaged previously. The influence-interest grid expands the boundaries of traditional system analysis by revealing hidden power dynamics and identifying stakeholders who might otherwise be overlooked. It helps highlight potential allies for building new alliances and uncovers leverage points where strategic engagement could unlock innovative pathways toward sustainable and inclusive solutions. By systematically mapping stakeholder relationships, the tool supports more effective collaboration and a stronger foundation for lasting change.

How to use the tool

Step 1: Stakeholder mapping using the influence-interest grid

Start by identifying all relevant stakeholders connected to the desired change or decision-making process. Plot each stakeholder on the grid with influence on the vertical axis and interest on the horizontal axis. This visual overview clarifies who holds power, who is highly interested, and who is less engaged. This foundational step provides the basis for prioritizing stakeholders and understanding their potential roles and impacts.

Step 2: Identifying potential allies and weak promoters & developing engagement strategies

Analyze the stakeholder distribution to reveal strategic engagement opportunities, particularly focusing on:

- **Low power / high interest stakeholders:** They often care deeply but lack the influence to effect change. How can we engage and empower them to increase their influence? Consider capacity building, advocacy support, or creating platforms for their voices.
- **Difficult-to-reach stakeholders:** Which stakeholders are less accessible or traditionally excluded? What creative outreach methods or trust-building approaches could facilitate their involvement?

By addressing these questions, facilitators can transform weak promoters into valuable allies and create new coalitions that advance the preferred future. Engagement is not static — stakeholders' positions may shift over time, so regular reassessment and adaptation of strategies are essential.

Outcomes and insights

The influence-interest grid frequently reveals unexpected stakeholder constellations and power imbalances that significantly shape change processes. It helps identify novel opportunities for coalition building by connecting high-interest groups with influential actors. Often, “hidden champions” emerge—stakeholders with untapped influence who could become powerful partners. Participants gain strategic clarity about where to focus efforts and how to sequence outreach for maximum impact. This leads to more inclusive, effective, and sustainable collaborative solutions.

Sources and licensing

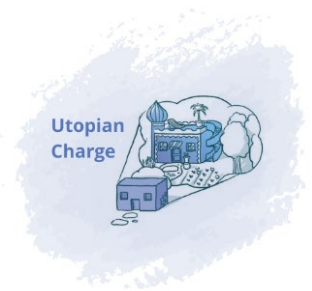
- Collective Leadership Institute (CLI): http://www.collectiveleadership.de/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Factsheet_12_StakeholderAnalysis_final.pdf
- URBACT: <https://urbact.eu/toolbox-home/implementing/stakeholders-powerinterest-matrix>

The basic framework is widely available through business and project management resources, and educational use is generally unrestricted.

Utopian charge

Overview

Utopian Charge is a quick-paced group activity created by Reinventing Society e.V. It prompts participants to collectively explore the utopian possibilities of a specific topic, idea, or initiative. Instead of debating if something is realistic, the emphasis is on spontaneous, bold, and optimistic thinking.



Why use this tool in the dialogue model?

This method supports the “**Develop**” phase in the dialogue model, especially after a shared understanding of the challenge has been established. It opens space for visioning, imaginative thinking, and surfacing emergent opportunities. By intentionally stepping away from realism, the group can overcome mental blocks and dominant paradigms that often limit creativity and courage. It is especially useful when a group feels stuck in analysis or constrained by present-day limitations.

How to use the tool

- Ask participants: “*What is the greatest utopian potential of [X]?*” — where X can be a situation, organization, meeting, or community.
- In rounds, each person shares spontaneous, even fantastical ideas without censoring or commenting.
- Keep the pace flowing; avoid evaluating ideas.
- After the round, participants can cluster or reflect on patterns and underlying values.
- Suggested duration: 20–40 minutes.
- Group size: Ideal with 5–10 participants.

Tips:

- Create an upbeat atmosphere (music or visual cues help).
- For online sessions, use the chat or shared whiteboards in case of connection problems.
- Consider follow-up: link utopian ideas to practical directions or principles.

Outcomes and insights

The Utopian Charge helps generate energy, break habitual thought patterns, and surface collective aspirations. It can be a turning point in the process, allowing participants to reconnect to purpose, identify common ground, or rethink power relations and roles. These visionary seeds can later be translated into action strategies and indicators of long-term success. It aligns especially well with the dialogue model's emphasis on collaborative ownership, trust, and possibility-driven change.

Sources and licensing

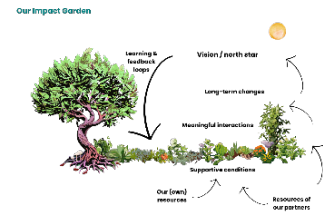
- **Developer:** Reinventing Society e.V. (<https://realutopien.info/>)
- **Instructions:** <https://realutopien.info/toolbox/utopian-charge/>
- **License:** Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

Impact garden

Overview

The Impact Garden is a visual and reflective tool developed by *Unity Effect* to help individuals and teams develop a holistic and intuitive Theory of Change. It acknowledges that while many of us have an intuitive sense of what conditions—such as trust, compassion, collaboration, and momentum—are needed to create lasting impact, traditional impact evaluation often overlooks these intangible elements.

Typically, evaluation focuses on logic models, indicators, and surveys, chasing measurable outputs while neglecting the “soil” in which impact truly grows. The Impact Garden metaphorically maps initiatives (seeds), enabling conditions (soil), nurturing practices (water), and inspiration (sunlight) to create a living system that recognizes and values both tangible and intangible aspects of change.



Why use this tool in the dialogue model?

The Impact Garden is especially useful during the “**Deliver**” phase, where reflection and vision turn into concrete strategies. It helps participants shift from linear, output-focused planning to systems thinking that appreciates interdependent conditions for impact. By grounding goals, resources, and intentions within a holistic framework, the tool encourages shared ownership and aligns practical actions with deeper motivations. Importantly, it invites participants to reconnect their intuitive understanding with their evaluation practice, anchoring learning beyond metrics and promoting ongoing adaptation and growth.

How to use the tool

- Begin by printing or drawing the Impact Garden template (available via Unity Effect).
- Reflect individually or as a team on:
 - **Seeds:** Which projects, initiatives, or ideas do we want to nurture?
 - **Soil:** What enabling conditions and capacities (e.g., trust, culture, values) will nourish growth?
 - **Water:** What practical behaviors and actions support development?
 - **Sunlight:** What bigger purpose or vision energizes the work?
 - **Weeds or pests:** What obstacles or limiting beliefs might inhibit progress?
- Start with individual reflection, then share and co-create a collective garden map using markers, sticky notes, or online whiteboards.
- Plan for 60–90 minutes depending on group size and discussion depth.

Tips:

- Create a reflective, open atmosphere that allows storytelling and intuition to surface.
- Use this tool before or alongside developing formal impact indicators or work plans.
- Optionally, revisit the garden after implementation for evaluation.

Outcomes and insights

The Impact Garden helps surface invisible yet critical enablers of impact, such as motivation, trust, and relational dynamics; elements often missed by conventional evaluation. It fosters an intuitive and systemic understanding of change, reminding participants that long-term transformation grows from interconnected conditions rather than isolated activities. This approach challenges the tendency to prioritize outputs over context and encourages embedding evaluation within a learning mindset. Participants often uncover misalignments between intentions and actions and discover new pathways for collaboration and sustained impact.

Sources & Licensing

- **Developer:** Unity Effect
- **Instructions & Template:** <https://www.unityeffect.net/resources/the-impact-garden>
- **License:** Freely available for non-commercial use. No formal Creative Commons license listed; attribution required.¹⁵

Post-Consultation Self-Assessment

Navigating Uncertainty Post-Consultation Self-Assessment

After you have received input from your coaches in the case clinic and other tools, use this worksheet to **reflect on your lessons learned and extended understanding** of your case.



1 Feelings and inspiration

Which feelings do you have after the consultation process and which inspiration(s) do you take from it?

2 Hidden patterns & dynamics

Below the surface, what characterizes and determines the status quo?

3 Diversity benefits

How do inclusivity and diversity add value?

4 Surprising discoveries

What are newly discovered novel and non-traditional actors and solutions from other cases and experiences helpful for the current case?

5 Leverage points

What are leverage points to overcome barriers and shift behaviors and mindsets?

Threats, fears, and conflicting interests to reduce.

Common interests and incentives to strengthen.

6 The long-term perspective

Which old things should be gone?

What is necessary to build resilience into the new things?

Navigating Uncertainty Post-Consultation Direction Setting

If you want to go towards preparing an action plan, this worksheet might be helpful to determine your direction.



1 Initial core group / supporters

Collaboration starts small.
Which people and actors are highly interested in change and can make a difference?
How can you build up an initial core group of dedicated actors?

2 Emotionally compelling goal

How could you phrase the goal/s in an emotionally compelling way that resonates with your key stakeholders? Don't forget to ask your initial core group for input!

3 Goal mapping

Create a first draft of your goal, broken down into clear, logical steps or objectives. This will help you understand what needs to be done (e.g., in a list or mind map).

4 Towards new alliances

What engagement initiatives and processes could generate enough stakeholder interest to expand the initial core group? What resources could be pooled and what goals could be aligned?

5 How to observe progress

Use specific observation criteria to track and describe changes relative to the overall goal. The observed changes should be detailed as specifically as possible, using the following dimensions:

- Who or what has changed?
- How is the change observable?
- What caused the change?
- What is the future potential for further change?

Post-Consultation Action Plan

Navigating Uncertainty Post-Consultation Action Plan



This worksheet can help you to draft the **first concrete steps** toward achieving your goal.

You can use this page for each sub-goal / step you listed in step 3 of the direction-setting.

0 Name of the step / objective

1 Your role and commitment

WHO are YOU in this step?
What are your specific roles and responsibilities in this step?

Who are you NOT (what are the tasks and responsibilities of others)?

2 Stakeholders

Stakeholders are divided into two categories:

- **Collaborators:** Individuals critical for success and implementation, such as supporters from your initial core group, but also data providers, decision-makers, and supporters.

- Specific persons from the **target groups** for the intervention, including local communities and citizens to extend the collaboration ecosystem.

3 Support and resources

Specify the **SUPPORT** needed from your collaborators for a particular purpose and timeframe.

List all **RESOURCES** required for the step: human (assistants, colleagues), financial (cost), and other resources (venues, photocopies, travel arrangements).

5 Obstacles, risks in the process

Reflect **FEARLESSLY** on all obstacles you can imagine for this specific step.

4 Expected results

This is a **SHORT-TERM** perspective (e.g. weeks). Please keep to the step you describe.
What result do you expect from **THIS STEP**, as a base and fundament for the next step?

6 Managing risks and obstacles

For each potential obstacle in this step, determine what actions you can take to work around it or lessen its impact.
How can you gain agility to manage obstacles?

Glossary of key terms for the dialog model workbook

Challenge holder

The person who initiates and owns the sustainability case within the dialogue model. Typically, they are a decision-maker or central actor in the case context, open to questioning their assumptions and learning from others.

Coach

An active participant in the dialogue process who brings personal or professional insights to support the challenge holder. Coaches need not be technical experts; they can contribute valuable perspectives and collective intelligence.

Collective intelligence

The shared knowledge and insights that emerge from a group of diverse individuals working together. Harnessing this intelligence is a key goal of the dialogue process.

Convergent thinking

A phase focused on narrowing down options, identifying key insights, and developing actionable conclusions. Often follows divergent thinking.

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Dialogue model

A flexible, inclusive approach to navigating sustainability challenges through structured conversation, systems thinking, and co-creation. This workbook introduces and supports its use.

Divergent thinking

A phase of creative exploration where many perspectives, possibilities, and ideas are generated. It is essential for understanding complexity and surfacing innovative options.

Double Diamond model

A design thinking framework with two diamonds representing phases of divergence and convergence. Used in this workbook to structure the collaborative process.

Extensive boundaries

Refers to zooming out to consider broader trends, contexts, and systems beyond the immediate case.

Facilitator

The person who guides the group through the dialogue process. They create structure and hold space for inclusive participation. Facilitators need not have expert knowledge but should be familiar with the dialogue model and its tools.

Influence-interest grid

A stakeholder analysis tool that maps individuals and groups based on their level of influence and interest in a particular issue. Supports strategic engagement and alliance-building.

Intensive boundaries

Refers to zooming in on deeper layers within the case, such as values, assumptions, and structural patterns.

Leverage point

A strategic point within a system where a small change can lead to significant transformation. Identifying leverage points helps target interventions effectively.

Mental models

Deeply held beliefs, assumptions, or cultural narratives that influence how people perceive problems and act. Often unconscious, they shape system structures and behaviors.

Process architecture

The design and sequence of steps, roles, and tools that shape a collaborative process. It balances structure and flexibility to support learning and action.

Stakeholder constellation

The network of actors involved in or affected by a particular challenge, including their relationships, power, and interests.

System boundaries

The conceptual limits used to define what is included in a system. Expanding boundaries can reveal previously ignored actors, influences, or dynamics.

Systemic view / systemic thinking

An approach to understanding complex problems by seeing connections, feedback loops, and patterns rather than isolated events. It seeks root causes and long-term solutions.

Theory of Change (ToC)

A framework or map that describes how and why a desired change is expected to happen. It links activities and outcomes through assumptions and causal logic.

Tool (in this context)

A structured activity, method, or framework used to facilitate a step in the dialogue process. Each tool in the workbook supports a specific purpose, such as reflection, stakeholder analysis, visioning, or planning.

Transformative learning

A process where individuals critically examine their beliefs, assumptions, and worldviews, leading to shifts in how they understand and act in the world.

Utopian potential

The imaginative possibility of a better future, beyond current limitations. A focus in the Utopian Charge tool, inviting visionary thinking unconstrained by realism.

VUCA

An acronym for Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity. Describes the dynamic conditions in which today's sustainability challenges unfold.



We welcome your questions, reflections, and suggestions. If you would like to share feedback or tell us how you used the workbook in your context, please contact us at anna.goerner@tu-dresden.de and ralph.wollmann@uba.de.

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Our intention

We deeply appreciate the efforts of all contributors and organizations whose tools are referenced here. Our intention is to connect practitioners with existing, proven approaches — not to claim ownership. We hope this workbook encourages broader use, adaptation, and dissemination of systemic and collaborative methods for sustainability.