

**COUNTRY  
LEADERSHIP  
PROGRAM**

# Transformation by Design

Learning from the  
GFF Country Leadership Program  
for Health System Change (CLP)

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2024





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The Impact  
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# Preamble



**W**hen we first received the challenge to develop a Knowledge and Learning strategy for the World Bank's Global Financing Facility (GFF), the impulse came quickly: the first ones to be sounded out were those in the field, at the 'front lines' of our operational work in the 36 members countries. Liaison Officers, Focal Points, a few Task Team Leaders and key partners, all being asked – in the most systematic and direct way possible – an apparently simple question: If we were to devise a mechanism to help build capacity for greater effectiveness at country level, what areas of work would most benefit from it? In other words, what were the greatest competence development needs?

To our surprise – or maybe not – despite the diversity of country profiles and types of projects at stake, the answer was overwhelmingly convergent. The greatest need, by far and across countries, was in the **areas of leadership and governance**. While areas of technical knowledge such as health financing, RMNCAH-N, results and data use, monitoring or evaluation were deemed critical, the single most striking need in terms of competence development was in the field of leadership, management and governance. With some nuances, respondents would add language to the mix such as

“stakeholder engagement”, “alignment” and “coordination”. The finding was clear. **We knew where a leverage point was. We knew where to focus and what competence to help develop. We just didn’t know how.**

How could the GFF add value in this field of work? How could we help build capacity in an area in which international organizations had already invested millions of dollars over the past decades, with apparently disappointing results, to say the least? How could we avoid the ‘business-as-usual’ approaches? What were the ‘business-as-usual’ approaches? Why were they seemingly ineffective in relation to long-term, systemic outcomes? Why were such programs kept on despite the evidence for poor results? And most importantly, why and where did those fail to such an extent that the same demand keeps coming back again and again?

**The challenge seemed insurmountable, especially given the GFF was not – and is not – an academic institution or a training organization.**

These were some of the questions we were battling with. The challenge seemed insurmountable, especially given the GFF was not – and is not – an academic institution or a training organization. We had no history of developing these programs as part of our portfolio and there seemed to be a subtle resistance to acknowledge this type of activity as part of our core business. Moreover, we could sense at country level a general fatigue around “training programs”. Last but not least, the period was in the COVID pandemic. No activities in the countries, no missions, no in-person events.

**Rolling up our sleeves, we embraced the questions above with both passion and anxiety.** A new round of consultations took place. This time we sought to understand existing programs, previous experiences, and – most importantly – the challenges and failures people had encountered. **Sometimes rationally, often intuitively, we knew we had to do**

**something differently if we wanted to succeed and innovate.** We had to learn through the mistakes, our own and those of others. While at the same time listening to the usual suspects, we had to invite new partners to the table, get different perspectives, understand ‘what seems to work’ from different contexts. We had to converse with the clients, focus on the implicit knowledge and information, suspend our judgements, and let ourselves be immersed in the needs that were truly at stake, beyond the usual data and reporting flows. We had to build our pointers to action and our anchor principles based on the (few) cases where we found there was a genuine trust-based relationship between the GFF secretariat and leaders at country level. We had to do all that despite – or maybe because of – our own biases and agendas. Questioning those, engaging in deep listening, was – maybe – the key to the possibility of adding some real value to this field.

**The term ‘Country Leadership Program for Health Systems Change’ (CLP) emerged rather organically. It responded to the idea of a convening space for leaders in the health arena to come together and find collective responses to their most striking leadership challenges. A process to enhance the impact of countries’ own leadership agenda, in the long term, at a systemic level, based on a shared sense of collective ambition.**

As we interacted with stakeholders – at global and country level – it was clear we shouldn’t think of it as a ‘training course’, based on the usual modes of teaching and instruction. Instead, we understood from the outset that the **biggest differentiating factor in this program would lie in our capacity to gather and facilitate leadership conversations between the widest possible variety of stakeholders across the country health system.** This included government officials

(across ministries) but also leaders from CSOs, private sector organizations, international donors, technical partners and academia. The ambition would be to have them exchange their authentic views on the future of the health sector they were part of, in different ways. With an open, honest, transparent attitude. Speaking out – often to each other – their greatest hopes and anxieties, their concerns, their challenges. But also sharing their views about each other, perceived partners or perceived competitors, organizations that didn't necessarily have a history of trust-based dialogues between them.

...the key for success – we thought – was on creating and holding a space for constructive dialogue...

With this in mind, we agreed that the program couldn't be composed only of lectures, group work, exercises, planning, coaching or mentoring. While all that was part of the mix, **the key for success** – we thought – was on creating and holding a space for constructive dialogue, at the highest leadership level possible. One that could inspire and influence others in the system beyond the boundaries of the program itself. A process that could enable and tease out dreams and realistic perspectives on health systems, with a view to leaving legacies for the future. Individual and collective. Ambitions and motivations. Deep values and red lines not to be crossed. Empathy and tension. All at the same time, through a continuous, constructive and sustained dialogue.

Impossible. Won't make it. Too hard. Slightly awkward. Will not be accepted. Aiming too high. Won't get them in the same room. People don't open up. Not sustainable. Out of context. Too many conditions to put in place. Forget it.



**We heard all these statements, and more. Not once. Many times. We therefore knew we were possibly on the right track. It certainly wasn't 'business as usual'.**

Designing the program became our next challenge. Bringing along a set of experts, diverse, but complementary. Invested in working together on the vision and approach, rather than on an individual topic or area of expertise. Willing and ready to disrupt their own views and knowledge rather than impose their models. Working together with peers they've never met before. Different academic backgrounds, different practices, different languages. **One single key common characteristic though: a high sense of humility in taking up this challenge.** Gently but firmly – at times in hesitant, tentative ways – the program curriculum emerged; and adapted each time a new country came along.

Since 2021, the CLP has been run with 9 countries, engaging over 400 leaders in respective health arenas.

The rest of the story can be known through a comprehensive set of documents now available. The initial design framework, a complete package of documentation and evaluation materials, project briefs per country, dedicated webpages and a living community of practice of CLP Alumni, to name a few.

**Since 2021, the CLP has been run with 9 countries, engaging over 400 leaders in respective health arenas.**

Implementation research and evaluation findings now demonstrate significant achievements in areas such as 'systemic and collaborative impact', 'transformative leadership development' and 'sustainability and long-term impact'.

This said, there can never be full success or triumphalism in these ventures. Only humility and the capacity to learn from mistakes. It is important however to acknowledge and reflect on seemingly significant achievements. It's also our collective

and institutional responsibility. **With its flaws, weaknesses and errors – inherent to any significant emerging innovation – the CLP has demonstrated that it is possible to do things differently. To seek transformation by design.**

This booklet is a modest attempt to share some of those reflections, as imperfect and limited as they can be, mostly focused on the thinking and design behind this program. Looking backwards, we can't help feeling a sense of tentativeness and transience, as if it was never good enough to succeed. We gave it a try though. And just as the head of the GFF shared when the stakes were high, the challenges seemed insurmountable and fear was about to get the upper hand: if not now, then when?





# Introduction



**H**ow does one create the conditions for making a fundamental difference in healthcare when the challenges are highly complex, things change very fast, events are often unpredictable and the stakeholders are diverse, with multiple agendas? How do we engage such stakeholders in a continuous process of dialogue with actors that don't necessarily have a history of working and learning together (quite often the opposite)? How to explore a perspective of long-term, deeply transformative change, towards positive legacies for future generations, in a context filled with short-term response needs, so often bound by political agendas and institutional reporting obligations?

With these questions in mind the World Bank's Global Financing Facility for Women and Children (GFF) embarked on an innovative journey to deliver a leadership program that was really customized to the needs of the stakeholders on the ground, with the purpose of enabling a truly systemic impact. This was the challenge that the GFF's Knowledge and Learning team set itself.

We hope this booklet may help you to feel and understand the design and delivery principles behind an approach such as the GFF's Country Leadership Program (CLP)

A few years down the line and significant experience under our belts, we felt it was time to share our insights so that others in similar contexts could try out their own interventions inspired by our story so far.

Our aim is to stimulate a greater understanding of the impact of holistic and more emergent approaches to learning, building capacity and enhancing impact in complex contexts where a platform for multi-stakeholder collaboration is essential in order to be effective. Traditional, more linear and rationally-driven approaches are often easier to prepare and deliver but tend to have less lasting impact due to the lack of engagement of the whole human being and their disconnect with the realities that may be in the room and system during the learning and innovation process.

We hope this booklet may help you to feel and understand the design and delivery principles behind an approach such as the GFF's Country Leadership Program (CLP), and develop a sense of how this way of approaching capacity building in complex environments might enhance the impact of your current engagements.

We imagine this being of use to World Bank staff, contractors and partners, involved in designing and delivering transformative learning and impact programs for multiple stakeholders in complex operating realities. It would be wonderful if it also proved to be of use to others working in similar contexts.



# The Approach

**O**ne thing this booklet is not, is a handbook. There is no pre-defined structure and process for you to copy and paste. The reason is that this program emerged out of a context and evolved as the context evolved. It is neither a report nor an evaluation. It doesn't claim to cover all perspectives and is not an academic publication referencing all statements (in spite of the authors both having PhDs!). So what is this strange thing then?

Quite simply it is a distillation of learning into some key principles that we have discovered underlie the success of the program, interspersed with story fragments to illustrate how these principles played out in our experience. The idea is that you and others could draw on the principles to shape your particular intervention, crafted to meet the needs of your specific context.

Following this introduction, we will describe the principles as a whole and then go deeper into each principle with some examples.

This principle-led approach should help you to feel what was behind the Country Leadership Program and understand that the actual design and delivery can look very different depending on the context within which it takes place, even though the principles stay the same. It is a discipline to keep to the principles and a challenge to live them. That is where the deep learning is for us as practitioners, as we explore together what we truly believe works best to serve our communities and how we can support ourselves and each other to deliver that in the world.

**Bon voyage!**







# Principles of Practice



**T**hese principles make up the core of this booklet. They provide a guiding framework for developing high-impact programs in complex and fast-changing operating realities while recognizing that each operating reality is different.

Each situation needs interventions designed to fit that specific context, unfolding in tandem with the context as it evolves. Under the surface, the principles guide the practitioners. On the surface, they manifest as different expressions dependent on the culture and conditions of the context.

It is also important to note that even as we discuss each principle individually in the coming chapters, they make up a whole in which they are all fundamentally interconnected. Together they create the conditions for effective interventions that stay closely in touch with the evolving operating reality, including as much of that human, institutional and societal reality as possible in their analyses, designs and interventions.

The principles are written as “principles of practice”. This means that they can be operationalized and that teams can reflect together on whether they are enacting the principles or not. It also means they are largely derived from reflection on our practice, inductively, and not from any abstract concepts that we are trying to force an experience on to. We trust you will appreciate the authenticity of this approach. Enjoy!

## This is the list of principles:

- 01 • Agile Planning:** We plan as close to the needs of the context as possible in the knowledge that the plan can evolve as the context does
- 02 • Presence:** We tune in to what is present at each moment and respond appropriately
- 03 • Deep Purpose:** We keep the fundamental purpose of the program and the participants alive for all stakeholders throughout
- 04 • Positive Tensions:** We see all tensions as information and are curious about what we can learn from them
- 05 • Diversity:** We understand that greater complexity requires greater diversity and actively work to bring that requisite diversity to the program
- 06 • Curiosity:** We encourage everyone to be curious about each other's perspectives to help understand the system as a whole
- 07 • Holistic Design:** We invite different ways of knowing and multiple intelligences throughout the longer-term program using a combination of methodological approaches
- 08 • Integral Assessment:** We seek to understand the impact of the project in a holistic way in which people's experience is valued alongside any statistical data gathered



# Agile Planning

**We plan as close to the needs of the context as possible, in the knowledge that the plan can evolve as the context does.**



We need to find the often-unspoken issues that participants instantly recognize when they are made explicit.

The nature of the interventions that we are exploring here is that they take place in complex and rapidly changing environments. That makes traditional planning a challenge, for no sooner have you made a plan based on the current reality, than the reality changes and your plan is out of date.

Planning, however, does have an important role to play. In preparing for a program like this and specific events, we have to strive to understand the needs of the context to the best of our ability, even in the knowledge that the context will evolve. The more that we are deeply curious about the people, organizations and system we are looking to serve, the higher the probability that we will discover more fundamental causes as compared to more surface effects. We need to find the often-unspoken issues that participants instantly recognize when they are made explicit. People then feel that the fundamental issues are being addressed and real progress can be made. These underlying stories will serve to help us keep the connection to the group, the context and the longer-term purpose as we navigate the surface complexity.

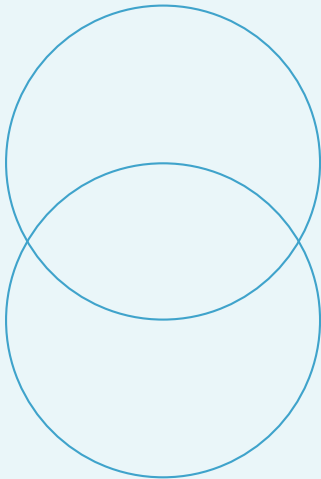
At the same time, the act of projecting our imagination forward into the future of a specific event helps to prepare us for possible eventualities. Forcing ourselves to reflect deeply on

what design of an event will best serve the longer-term goal of systemic change will give us the agility to respond to last minute needs while keeping the deeper pattern in place.

For an event we do – of course – make a plan for the sessions and the process, that emerges from the earlier reflection. That plan, rather than being something we should force ourselves to stick to, provides us with a way to feel into whether any proposed changes would serve the process. The plan is the best we could come up with given all we knew at that time. As new knowledge and insight emerges, we may choose to change the original plan, whilst at the same time remembering the reasons for our original design. The risk is that we throw overboard all of our earlier thinking and sensing to try and respond to something that appears urgent in the moment. For example, a stakeholder complains about the starting or ending time, and, in order to please them, we shorten the day and sacrifice a key part of the program. That is panic, not agility. **We need to be able to stay connected to our original reasoning and the longer-term purpose whilst at the same time sensing into the real needs of the moment.**



## The CLP Case



A Country Leadership Program is initiated by a country requesting a program. The first step that the GFF's Knowledge and Learning team takes is to embark on a needs assessment. Should the team agree that the context is appropriate for a CLP, then a document is drawn up describing the needs that a CLP would be designed to meet, and both parties sign the document before any further steps are taken.

With that agreement in place, the team is then able to sense into how the CLP will be adapted to meet the needs and specific context. This is what gives the team the underlying story that they keep coming back to. Should a new understanding of the needs emerge, then these are checked carefully with the country to make sure everyone is (re-)aligned.

Three overlapping circles of varying shades of blue, arranged in a triangular pattern. The top circle is a medium blue, the bottom-left is a lighter blue, and the bottom-right is a darker blue. They overlap in the center.

# Presence

**We tune in to what is  
present at each moment  
and respond appropriately.**





Reality is what is happening in the moment. People come alive when they feel connected to reality.

**P**resence is the complement to Agile Planning. Having done lots of thinking and rigorous planning, we need to park the plan in the background and be with the process that is unfolding in the moment. How many times have we not seen facilitators lose touch with a room of people, because they are so focused on delivering their planned program that they seem to be blind to what is going on under their noses? When that happens, people drift off, out come the mobile devices and you've lost them.

Reality is what is happening in the moment. People come alive when they feel connected to reality. The art as a designer and facilitator is to be able to engage directly with what is going on with people in the room (even if it is a virtual room). If someone has a question and you're not really listening because you are concerned with starting the next part of the program exactly at the time you had planned – then you lose them. If there is a passionate discussion going on at a table and you just plough on ignoring it, then you lose them. If someone makes a point that is contentious and it brings tension into the room, and you don't name it or explore it, but just move on, you lose them. When you lose one person, you soon lose others. You may still complete the program you had planned, but it will be hollow. No-one will have properly taken it in, and ultimately everyone's time and resources will have been wasted.

Being present with people makes them feel seen and taken seriously – meaning they are far more likely to respond and engage. This can feel scary as a facilitator, as it means us being open to things happening that we had not planned or foreseen. It means not knowing – something our Western-trained minds are not well prepared for. At the same time, it can be a big release of stress – all we have to do is to be present with what is going on around us and engage it with curiosity. We don't have to be worrying the whole time about the program or the outcomes. For the participants they will see that you are not there to simply impose an agenda from outside on them – something particularly important in intercultural contexts where there may be a history of oppression or colonialism. They will experience you as being authentically there for them and that makes all the difference in the world.

**This comes with a deep level of trust. Trust that we will know how to respond adequately whatever happens.**

**Trust that the participants will engage constructively.**

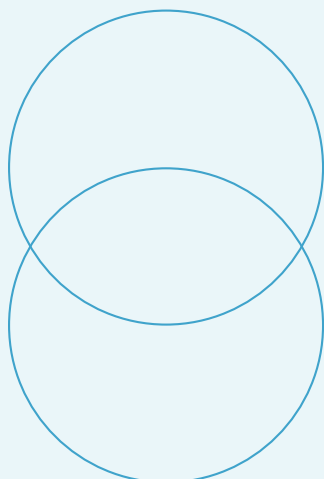
Trust that whatever the path, we will get to some relevant outcomes – even if they are different to the ones we thought up in advance. Trust in ourselves and in our colleagues. If you are stuck for a response at some point, turn to your colleagues, or even your participants. Admit that in this moment you don't have a response and ask if anyone else does. You'll often be surprised what wisdom emerges from others in the room. That act of vulnerability builds relationship between you and the participants, as they know that you won't spin them any old story but will be honest with them. It increases the likelihood that they will take you seriously and really listen to the things that you do say.

If this feels unfamiliar to you and you are wondering how you can build this presence muscle, start with a basic mindfulness practice. **Whichever particular method suits you. It helps you to experience what it means to be present in the moment, not to get caught up in your opinions and judgements, but just to be with what is there with an openness and curiosity to explore. From that space, there is very little that can go wrong.**





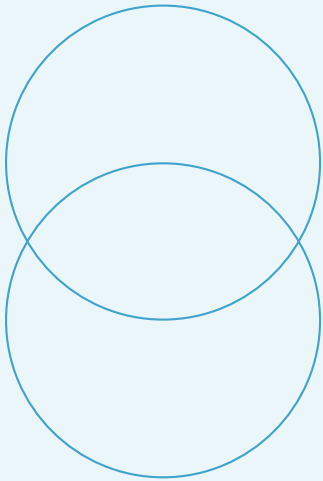
## The CLP Case



As institutional representatives, often from the Global North, standing in front of a room full of leaders from a Global South country, building trust and getting beyond the stereotypes, pre-judgments and fears that may exist is essential from the very beginning. Demonstrating authentic interest and respect for the people in room, as well as a heartfelt passion for the mission they all share around health systems, were critical ingredients for success.

From the first preparatory meeting with the core team in the country, even the first email sent, the tone is set. From the first in-person meeting at our leadership retreat, be it at drinks the evening before or when we step onto stage the first morning, people are sensing, consciously or unconsciously – is this person really here for me, for us, or are they just another set of experts parachuting in to peddle their wares? The answer to that question determined whether people showed up just to claim their daily allowance or really to engage in fundamental improvements to the national healthcare system and the lives of millions of people.

We often needed each other as a team to keep us present, sensing what was really relevant for the group at that moment. We all disappear off into our judgements from the past or fears for the future



sometimes – it's just human. Having a team where these principles are explicit enables us to support each other to live them. The presence and authenticity we practice with each other in the team will determine the extent to which we will be able to share those qualities with the participants. During one of the sessions with the participants for example we experimented with just sitting in silence for a short while and noticing how one responds. The result was profoundly humbling, to say the least.



# Deep Purpose

**We keep the fundamental purpose of the program and their work alive for all stakeholders throughout.**



Deep purpose is not the same as pre-defined outcomes of a program that need to be measured to evaluate success and learn for improvement. Deep purpose is the why behind the work people do.

The more complex a challenge is, the more diverse the stakeholders need to be. The more diversity is involved, the deeper the connecting purpose needs to be. Given that this kind of program is designed for complex environments, diversity is a condition for success. Diversity outperforms homogeneity when it is connected to an overarching super-ordinate goal that all the partners feel is essential to their mission. Without that, diversity becomes fragmentation as seemingly conflicting interests win the day. Deep purpose provides the glue that holds the diversity together and keeps it focused on mutual interest.

Deep purpose is not the same as pre-defined outcomes of a program that need to be measured to evaluate success and learn for improvement. Deep purpose is the why behind the work people do. It is what gives meaning to them, their reason to get out of bed every day to do the work. It transcends individual interest, be that of an individual person or institution. No one person or stakeholder could achieve it on their own – they need each other. At the same time, achieving it would go a long way towards each partner achieving their individual goals. It is something that leaves a **legacy**, that you would be proud to tell your grandchildren you contributed to. It is the thing that people would build a statue to commemorate. It has a strong emotional quality to it. In fact, it may even transcend rational arguments, as no-one might be able to see yet how on earth

that purpose could be achieved. But there is a deep belief that it is worth working for and that *where there is a will, there is a way*.

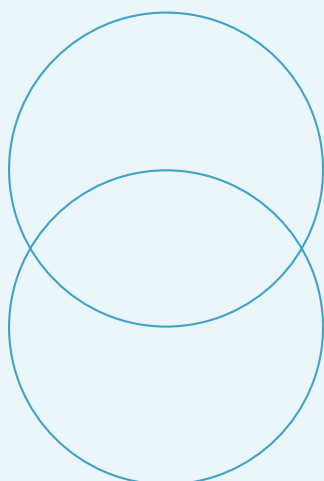
**This may not be easy for everyone, particularly in a relatively formal institutional context. Given that deep purpose goes beyond the purely rational, some people may feel challenged to engage with it in an organizational, professional context.** Likewise certain cultures might feel that this level of conversation is more for the private sphere than the work environment.

During a collaboration like the Country Leadership Program with the diversity of stakeholders involved, tensions are bound to arise. Reminding people of the deep purpose is what enables them to slow down their rational intelligence, take a breath, park their individual concerns and agendas, and lean back into the collective project. This is critical for success. It is very easy for people to fall back into posturing for the sole interests of their own perspective and organization. When that happens, nothing systemic can be achieved, by definition. Keeping everyone connected to their jointly owned deep purpose is what helps them to lean into the unknown of their collective success. It requires constant attention from the facilitation team, during in-person events but in particular between meetings when partners are surrounded only by their own native, daily environment. The deep purpose has to energize them, so they take time out from their normal work and routines to work on this transcendent project and goal.





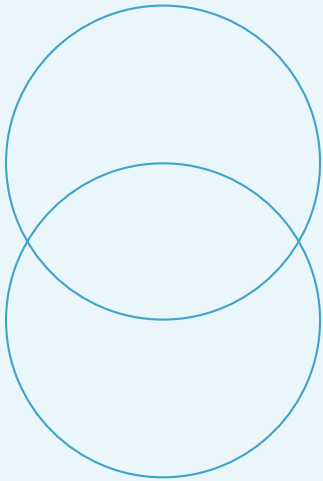
## The CLP Case



Before a Country Leadership Program is agreed to with a country partner, a needs assessment is made in the country to discover what the deep purpose is that lies behind the country's request for a CLP. The outcomes of that research are shared in a Project Brief outlining the nature of the Purpose as well as other related outcomes. It also describes what the CLP is designed to deliver and what not, clarifying accountabilities on both sides. The government counterpart and the GFF have to sign off on this document before a CLP can proceed.

This process is essential as it starts to make the implicit Purpose explicit to all stakeholders. It gives everyone something to refer back to, pointing to it when needed, as shared language and agreement. This is more than an administrative document. We have to make sure that the partners really understand what is in the document, what it means and what the implications are. This is a key part of creating the container that will make a CLP a success.

The CLP Leadership Retreat, which kicks off the formal year-long program, is the place to really emphasize the Deep Purpose across all stakeholders. As facilitators we continually refer back to it. After this event, the Purpose is what should motivate them all to keep collaborating – if it stops after the event then we will not achieve our goals.



To support that, we embed an expert in the ministry of Health – for a period of one year – who coaches the team to stay connected to the Purpose as well as to the key principles and focus of the CLP. Without any ongoing support, in-person or virtual, the chances of success for this kind of project are slim. It is too easy for people to go back to business usual. It is essential to keep the Deep Purpose alive. That’s the core of what many would call effective institutionalization.



# Positive Tensions

**We see all tensions as information and are curious about what we can learn from them.**



The act of treating a tension seriously in the first place goes a long way to discharging any fear or anger related to it. People feel heard, seen and taken seriously themselves.

In a context with high levels of complexity, rapid change and a diversity of stakeholders, tension is inevitable. The question is how we choose to relate to it. Tension contains highly valuable information about a system. The challenge is that the information often comes wrapped in emotion, making it hard to get to the real gift inside. It is important to acknowledge the presence of the emotion as that is part of the information. The denial or suppression of an emotion in a person will likely lead to their disengagement. Acknowledging the emotion allows it to just be there without everyone getting pulled into it while keeping them engaged. That enables people to enquire with real curiosity about the nature of the tension and what it is telling us about what is needed.

The act of treating a tension seriously in the first place goes a long way to discharging any fear or anger related to it. People feel heard, seen and taken seriously themselves. It also elevates the conversation to the needs of the system as a whole rather than any individual's personal issues that may have been triggered.

When a tension arises, it is therefore important to go through a number of steps. Note that although these steps are described in a linear way here, in reality they are likely to be held more fluidly by a facilitator. Firstly, name the fact that you are sensing

a particular tension and check to see if other people are sensing it too.

Secondly, if necessary, acknowledge and validate any emotion that may be related to the tension – a simple comment such as “I see that this issue has upset you, would you like to tell us why?” can diffuse negativity and move everyone into a process of trying to understand the perspectives present and get a more informed picture of the system.

Thirdly, make sure everyone really understands the essence of the tension. What is it really about? Ask more questions, go deeper into the tension, even if it feels uncomfortable. Try and surface the core of it. The clearer the real tension is, the more chance we have of coming up with a response to integrate it and helping the system as a whole to achieve its goals and purpose.

Fourthly, explore what information you feel this tension has for the project or system. What is it telling us? How is it helping us to understand things better? What are we learning? What insights are we gaining?

**Finally, explore if there is a proposal for how to integrate the information gleaned from this tension moving forward. What needs to change to take this information into account? A proposal can be very unformed to start with, a rough idea.** Others can help to craft it into something that everyone feels is good enough for now to move forward with. It doesn't have to be futureproof forever – just good enough to take a next natural step and gather the next round of information from that step.

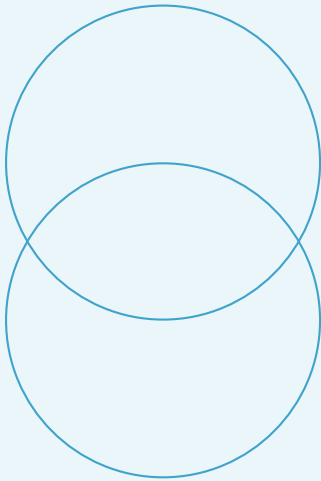
Treating tensions this way can be a great release for a team and participants. It creates a safe space for tensions to be voiced, knowing that they will not be judged but taken seriously as a contribution to the project. In this context, things do not “go wrong”, they just happen differently to how we thought they would happen. We encourage people to try things out, fail fast, gather feedback and iterate in rapid cycles.

It creates a safe space for tensions to be voiced, knowing that they will not be judged but taken seriously as a contribution to the project.





## The CLP Case



The CLP includes pedagogical elements that are new for many in the institutional context in which it operates. This in itself creates tension. Successfully navigating the expectations of colleagues when trying to do something differently is key to institutional support for a project like this. Once more, it is not about judging what is better or not. It is about understanding the various perspectives and inviting all stakeholders into a process of co-creating something that will best serve the shared deep purpose and honor those perspectives.

We encountered many tensions along the way during the program itself of course, including different management preferences and priorities, cultural issues with some of the content, resistance to the style of some presenters, starting and ending times of the program, challenges with institutionalization after the retreat. Regardless of the nature and size of the tension, we treat them with the same approach, all as important information, as it sets a cultural norm in the team that radiates out to the participants and the program as a whole.



# Diversity

**We understand that greater complexity requires greater diversity and actively work to bring that requisite diversity to the program.**





The reason diversity is so important is that it brings many different perspectives to bear on a situation.

The higher the levels of complexity in a system, the greater the diversity that is required to come up with adequate solutions. The kind of contexts this booklet is designed to support, and that the Country Leadership Program was a response to, are ones with a high complexity of subject matter, multiple stakeholders and a high speed of change. These are exactly the kind of contexts that require high diversity to increase chances of success. This is not about diversity for diversity's sake, but diversity to match the level of complexity of the context.

The reason diversity is so important is that it brings many different perspectives to bear on a situation. It is like shining multiple lights from many different angles on a large object in a dark room that we are trying to understand. The more lights and angles, the better. Perspectives are not opinions that we have to agree with – they are points of view on a particular topic that exist whether we like it or not, and that we need to at least understand so we know as much about the dynamics at play as possible.

Appreciating the diversity of perspectives that are present not only enriches our understanding of a situation, it also gives us the greatest chance of coming up with interventions that will meet the most needs that are present. Meeting the greatest

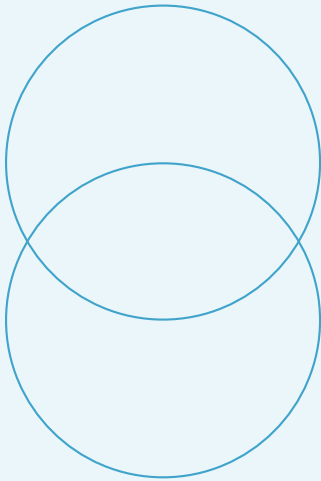
possible number of needs means we are less likely to encounter resistance and more likely to build allies in what we are trying to achieve.

Now we all know that diversity does not always make things easier. It can definitely slow things down initially as we need to take time to understand the perspectives present and try to appreciate why those perspectives are important for the stakeholders that hold them. However, it is slowing down earlier to speed up later. With parties more aligned, the likelihood of success and speed of implementation is radically increased. Diversity is likely to create more tension, as described in the previous principle. Even though everyone might agree on the shared Deep Purpose, they may be doing so for different motivations and hold different ideas on how to best achieve it. Understanding those motivations is essential for avoiding conflicts and misunderstandings further down the line.

**The art for the program facilitators lies in how you work with the diversity. The Tension principle covers many aspects. High diversity not managed well leads to underperformance compared to uniformity.** This is because the complexity that is present due to the diversity creates conflict and confusion, as compared to a situation where everyone is in alignment already when things can proceed relatively swiftly and harmoniously. However, when it is managed well, high diversity greatly outperforms uniformity due to the richness of perspectives that can be integrated, creating outcomes with a higher chance of success. That is what is needed to successfully engage a highly complex operating reality such as the healthcare sector in countries in the Global South.



## The CLP Case



In the Country Leadership Program, the team was insistent on making sure that a diversity of stakeholders was present. The convener of the program was always the country government which meant that the easy option was to enrol primarily public sector participants. The CLP team made it a condition to have participants from other public sectors, from civil society, academia, donor partners, international agencies and the private sector as well.

The retreat process was designed around working groups with people from as many different sectors as possible. The process of learning about the perspectives of the different stakeholders in these groups was one of the most valuable for the participants. It created the conditions for much of the successful collaboration that continued after the retreat and beyond the formal end of the year-long CLP program.



# Curiosity

**We encourage everyone to be curious about each other's perspectives to help understand the system as a whole.**



When people do share in that spirit, they are entrusting you with their vulnerability. It is critical to honor and respect whatever they share with you.

This principle proved to be one of the easiest for participants to feel the meaning of, and one of the most impactful in terms of behavior. When we are committed to trying to understand the whole system, such as healthcare for example, then we can feel the importance of understanding the different perspectives that are part of that system. The best way to get a good sense of those perspectives is to be radically curious about them. That means really wanting to know how someone sees a particular issue through the lens of their role in the system.

Curiosity means suspending judgement in favor of understanding. Listening deeply to someone explain how they see a situation enables us to be much better informed about the system as a whole and therefore better equipped to make interventions that are likely to succeed. At the same time, when we are authentically curious about someone's point of view, people feel seen and valued, and are more likely to share in the spirit of helping you to understand their role and needs.

When people do share in that spirit, they are entrusting you with their vulnerability. It is critical to honor and respect whatever they share with you. It is their perspective and as such cannot be wrong – it is simply true that they see the world in that way, whether you agree with it or not.

This kind of exchange builds deep relationship and therefore resilience into the system of stakeholders. When people can

share with each other their whole perspective without fear of judgement, knowing that the others will take them seriously, the reality of the system becomes visible enabling everyone to see what is going on and therefore what the most effective interventions are likely to be. Rather than a group of stakeholders sitting opposite each other competing for their interests around an issue, the stakeholders sit alongside each other looking together at the issue, trying to work out together what would best serve the system as a whole. The difference that this makes to the likelihood of positive sustainable impact cannot be understated.

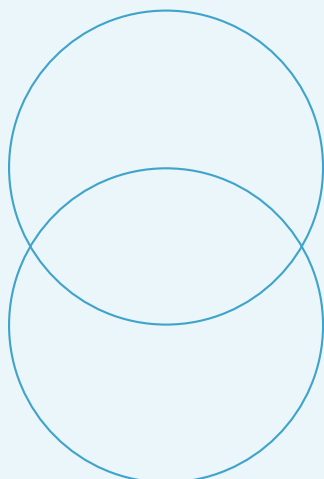
The practice of curiosity starts with an assumption that there is something of great value to be found in the perspective of the other, a treasure to be revealed.

The practice of curiosity starts with an assumption that there is something of great value to be found in the perspective of the other, a treasure to be revealed. If we don't feel we have discovered it yet in the conversation, we need to keep asking, keep digging. The person themselves might not even be conscious of the treasure they hold through their perspective. It sometimes requires another person with that authentic curiosity to help them name it and see it themselves. That is a great gift that curiosity can give the other, as well as ourselves and the mission we are working towards.

Sometimes in this process of inquiry we seem to have reached a limit, an end to the conversation. If your sense is that you are not quite there yet, together you have not yet uncovered the essence, then allow yourselves a moment of silence. Silence can do wonders in allowing the right side of the brain to process connections and synthesize parts into deeper insight. Just hold the question open, don't jump to try and resolve it too quickly, allow time to do its work. The insights that come from such a moment can hold the key to the significant systemic impact that the group is wanting to make. They are worth waiting for.



## The CLP Case



Early on during the five-day leadership retreat that kicks off the CLP we introduce this idea of the importance of understanding different perspectives. It is usually brought in under the topic of systems thinking. With that principle established, we can now invite people to be curious about the different perspectives that others in the room hold, as that is the best way to come to understand them.

We deliberately have participants in working groups composed of multiple stakeholders, so they have the experience of engaging different perspectives. Participants often point to the experience of coming to understand the perspectives of the other stakeholders as the most important part of the experience. It builds trust and relationship that creates the foundation for the ongoing collaboration that is needed if they are to achieve sustainable systemic change together.

While the principle described above is primarily focused on the interaction between participants, during the CLP program the same is applied to the use of data and evidence to better understand the system and take decisions. Getting good data is a result of really wanting to know what is going on the ground, from a spirit of radical curiosity.



# Holistic Design

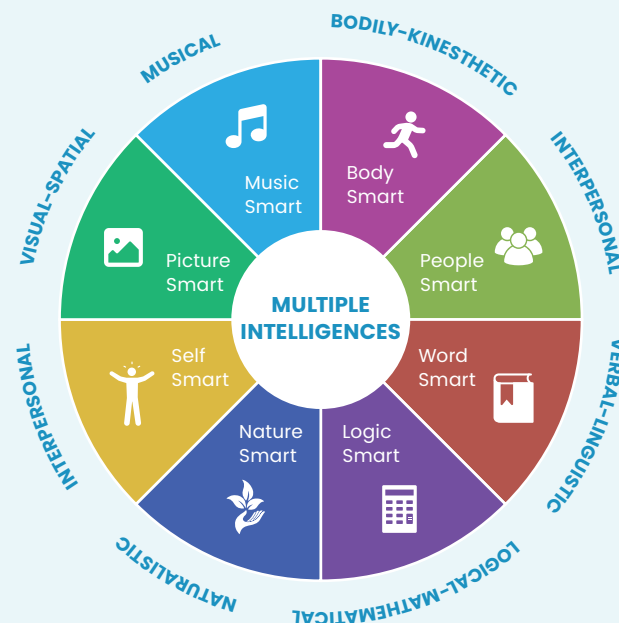
**We invite different ways of knowing and multiple intelligences throughout the longer-term program using a combination of methodological approaches.**





Each person is different and has their own preferred ways of learning – of absorbing information and turning it into insight that informs future action. While clearly it is not possible to tailor-make experiences like the CLP to each individual, there has been enough research done that describes more generic learning styles that cover most people’s preferences.

An example of this is Howard Gardner’s multiple intelligences. We can all possess the set of eight core abilities that Gardner proposes but tend to have a dominant intelligence that also influences our preferred way of learning.



There is also plenty of work around different personality types that influence our learning preferences, such as Myers Briggs, the Hogan Assessments and Big Five. On top of that we can look at developmental models that explore our maturity through different areas of growth, such as Robert Kegan's self-concept or Spiral Dynamics' Values Systems.

It is too much to try and assess participants in all these different aspects, so the best we can do is to provide different ways of experiencing learning opportunities that will hopefully provide as many people as possible with an engaging way to learn and grow.

This is critical if we are going to make the most of the diversity that we need, as described above. If we invite in the requisite diversity that could successfully engage the complexity of the challenge, then we need to provide ways for that diverse group of people to engage productively in the learning and collaboration experience, or else we will not be able to benefit from the diversity that we have so carefully curated.

...we need to provide ways for that diverse group of people to engage productively in the learning and collaboration experience...

Examples of different forms that can support a diversity of learning preferences include reading, watching videos, listening to audio, lectures, experiential learning activities, task-based exercises, gaming, group discussion, self-reflection, meditation, journaling, peer coaching, body movement and positioning, drawing and painting, etc. Providing a variety of ways to engage will make people feel more positive about the learning experience and even if not all the activities fit their preference, if there are some that do, then they are likely to make more of an effort during their less favourite activities.

On top of the diversity of people and learning preferences, there is a diversity of content that we want people to engage in.

**Different kinds of content attract different participant profiles in often completely distinct ways. It is blend and balance of content introduced that holds the collective engagement – acknowledging not all participants will be equally engaged at the same time.**

Finally, there are various domains of competence – leadership competence – at stake in this program. The most important of those are the components of knowledge, skills and attitudes. Only by articulating these three dimensions of individual competence in an integrated manner can we guarantee a transformative experience with effective impact in practice and performance. Transferring knowledge alone will not suffice. While knowing about key topics is essential to perform competently, no actual change in practice will occur if that knowledge is not accompanied with the adequate skills to do something (different) accompanied by the appropriate **mindset, the kind of attitude needed to drive such change.** The challenge from a design and facilitation perspective is that developing knowledge requires a different type of learning approach than developing skills or attitudes. While one can acquire new knowledge through reading, for example, it is only possible to develop a new skill through practice. A specific attitude, however, can best be developed through critical thinking, sensing, feedback and modelling, for example – all that from lived experience.

While one can acquire new knowledge through reading, for example, it is only possible to develop a new skill through practice.

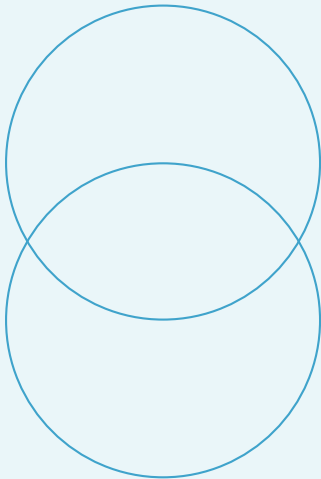
It may seem complex to have to take all these things into account – intelligences, personalities, developmental stages, types of content, competences. The key is just to provide a

pallet of experience for people so we do what we can to meet the needs and strengths of as many participants as possible. In this process we, as designers, need to be aware of what our own preferences are, as our natural tendency is of course to create a program that we feel would work best from our own perspective. Walking our own talk in this program requires us to take some distance from our own preferences and design an approach that meets the needs of those we are designing it for.

One final point on this topic. As well as appreciating the diversity of people, content and learning approaches, we need to invite people to sense the relationships between all this diversity. Stepping back and reflecting on the patterns that connect ensures that the important differentiation we make does not slip into fragmentation. Fragmentation only sees the parts and forgets the whole, which is a recipe for all sorts of problems. **Differentiation appreciates the diversity yet acknowledges an underlying interconnectedness between all the parts. If we can achieve the latter, then we are well on the way to achieving the kind of impact we need.**



## The CLP Case



The Country Leadership Program formally runs for a year. During that process, participants are exposed to the following forms of engagement:

- **Topic-based webinars**
- **Live in-person retreat (including talks, working groups, experiential activities, reflection)**
- **Interactive group work**
- **1:1 coaching**
- **Team coaching**
- **Reading material**
- **Toolkit with exercises**
- **Online courses**
- **Community platform**
- **Videos on relevant subject matter**

This is an example of providing a diversity of forms for engagement.



# Integral Assessment

**We seek to understand the impact of the project in a holistic way in which people's experience is valued alongside any statistical data gathered.**



There are a lot more opportunities for research and experimentation that we hope you and others will undertake.

This is probably the principle that we still have to work out the most. We understand the importance of it and have made some first steps. There are a lot more opportunities for research and experimentation that we hope you and others will undertake.

One of the core frameworks that we work with in the CLP is the **Integral Quadrants model** developed by philosopher Ken Wilber. As you can see from the graphic, the model points to four main perspectives. One axis points to the individual and collective perspectives, the other axis points to the interior and exterior dimensions. Wilber came to this model by looking at lots of different theories that are out there and asking what they describe or point to. The four perspectives in the quadrants are his conclusions. Each approach held a part of the truth, but none of them the whole truth. The question is how to integrate them while honoring each perspective.



From Ken Wilber, *A Theory of Everything*

Behavior is observable but to get to the motivation behind the behavior we actually have to talk to a person.

The individual has a behavior and physical organism that we can observe and measure without actually engaging with the individual. However, we also all have an interior experience and our own lens on the world that determines how we interpret that world which we experience around us and therefore how we choose to engage with it. That is not something that we can understand just by observing someone. Behavior is observable but to get to the motivation behind the behavior we actually have to talk to a person.

The same is true at the collective level. Collectively we build systems, structures, processes in the exterior world around us. Those we can see, study and evaluate relatively objectively. However, we also know that collectively we hold certain values and beliefs that influence how we design that world around us. That is commonly known as our culture and needs a different form of engagement, more anthropological.



What is important is that we take all four of these perspectives into account when carrying out an evaluation of a situation. What can we observe about people's behavior? What can we find out about people's motivations and inner drives? What is important to assess in the organizational structures and processes? How are the collective beliefs and values of the culture influencing the project?

People remember events in their lives and the kind of impact they had on their work moving forward.

With a program like this we are interested in the longer-term impact. Given that we are addressing systemic changes and more deeply held attitudes in people, we need to think about how to assess the impact of the program in a timespan that is realistic for those kinds of changes. The nature of these kinds of contexts is that people move around, change jobs, and the operating reality evolves. Pinning down exactly what impact can be traced back to a program like this is very challenging. Stories seem to be one of the most useful ways. People remember events in their lives and the kind of impact they had on their work moving forward. Eliciting stories over a longer period from a sample of people could be one way of getting a more accurate picture and feedback.

As we said above, it is too early for us to draw any conclusions about the CLP case on this topic of evaluation. If we are going to honor the complexity of the contexts we are working with in these kinds of interventions, then we need to find ways of getting feedback that go beyond short-term observable effects.

**We need to take into account the complexity of the whole human being, the intangible nature of culture and the hard-to-measure ripples across a system that by their nature are unpredictable and hard to classify.**

It is critical to acknowledge this gap in our current evaluation practices or else we risk falling back on existing practices that do not do justice to the real impact of this kind of program. That carries with it all the related consequences when an institution just looks at rapidly harvested numbers to inform decisions about future resource-allocation.

We look forward to sharing how our insights evolve in this area and to hearing from you about approaches and experiences that can help us all to get a clearer picture of a reality that often eludes our limited analytical approaches. Let's explore how we can honor the complexity and diversity of life that, after all, our people and institutions are an expression of.





# The Impact of the CLP

**As mentioned in the previous section, identifying and assessing impact of a program like the CLP is in itself a complex endeavour.**



In general, in our experience we feel our institutional contexts are ill-equipped to render explicit such type of individual or systemic transformation.

Looking into aspects such as personal motivations or mindset shifts, or systemic changes in the long-term, requires not only multiple assessment devices, methodologically speaking, but also a time frame that enables such transformative shifts to take shape. Most of those are tacit, implicit, invisible to the eyes. They operate within oneself or under the surface of an organization or country system. Such changes are hard to identify, tap into and name. In general, in our experience we feel our institutional contexts are ill-equipped to render explicit such type of individual or systemic transformation. Our evaluation models are to a large extent based on existing paradigms of planning and engineering, built on frameworks of linear causality. As we've seen above, this program calls into question the core of that perspective. In other words, evaluating the impact of this program with the usual institutional instruments at hand is an exercise of continuous frustration. Very much like measuring the profound impact of a symphonic orchestra with a decibel device.

This said, we took this challenge to our colleagues working with Implementation Research and Evaluation. We asked them to try and develop a method and instruments to help capture the value and impact of the CLP – across countries – in a way that could be understood and used by the stakeholders involved.

The paragraphs below are not the result of that work – that is presented in appropriate formats, independent of this informal booklet. They are however excerpts of some findings from the CLP evaluation. To a certain extent, they speak to how actors involved perceive the value and impact of this program.

### **Systemic and Collaborative Impact**

The programs fostered systemic changes by embedding CLP principles, leading to significant advancements in several areas such as organizational restructuring, stakeholder collaboration and curriculum development. This was translated into significant improvements in governance structures and enhanced stakeholder engagement. As a consequence, in Nigeria, a state RMNCAEH+N coordination platform was approved.

### **Transformative Leadership Development**

The CLP focused heavily on transformative leadership development. This was characterized by significant personal growth in leadership skills, particularly in communication, collaboration, and strategic thinking. Participants reported a clear understanding of how to apply their learning to their professional environments, emphasizing the program's effectiveness in inspiring both practical and conceptual leadership changes. They mentioned a clearer capacity to steer organizational change in line with national priorities.



### **Evidence-Based Decision Making**

Strengthening data use across multiple levels was one of the program's objectives. The CLPs enhanced multisectoral prioritization, resource allocation, and performance management through improved data-driven decision-making competences. This was foundational to support the creation of data dashboards and improving decision-making practices across the teams. In Guatemala, for instance, leaders emphasized the importance of the GFF support for the creation of "Salas Situacionales" (data dashboards).

### **Sustainability and Long-Term Impact**

The question of sustainability of the CLP programs was highlighted, with many participants reporting ongoing benefits such as the continued application of leadership competencies in their daily activities. The enduring legacy of the CLP programs is seen in both the empowerment and ongoing engagement of leaders and the contribution to systemic improvements in public health. This dual impact fosters long-term change and continuous progress in national health systems.

These findings, per se, are not a judgement on the value, pertinence and impact of the CLP as such. That is a matter for more substantive analysis and discussion. They do, however, reveal a sense of alignment between what we've noticed through our practice, what we've learned on that journey, and what has been perceived to be the most significant impact of the program in the countries analyzed.

The following two quotes, from distinct government officials in different CLP countries, make a generous synthesis of what many participants shared on this program:

**"I look at the CLP as a game changer in leadership. Eventually we will have a generation of leaders with a new way of thinking and handling things. Really it has a far-reaching impact." (Mar 2023)**

**"Amid our fatigue and sometimes excessive workload, this workshop becomes our heaven, a moment of rejuvenation. It enlightens us to a profound truth: we are integral pieces of a grander puzzle, each carrying weight in crafting impactful change." (Apr 2024)**

**Somehow, this story tells us transformation by design is possible, and it may well be the path forward when what is at stake is complex, systemic change for the long-term.**

**COUNTRY  
LEADERSHIP  
PROGRAM**

# Transformation by Design

