SYNERGOS
Building trust works

BRIDGING LEADERSHIP FOR COLLABORATION

ACROSS THE EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE & DEVELOPMENT ECOSYSTEM IN BANGLADESH

A Resource Pack developed by Synergos, Bangladesh



Bridging Leadership for Collaboration
Across the Early Childhood Care and Development Ecosystem in Bangladesh

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A DEDICATION TO

JOY AND ALIA

Dear Alia, Dear Joy, and every young child in Bangladesh,

We dedicate our efforts to your joy, your safety, your health, your growth. We commit to nurturing you with love so you may grow, learn, thrive, and achieve your full potential.

We will work hard to ensure that your earliest days are filled with health, nutrition, learning, security and care.

We recognize your right to a childhood full of play, discovery, and dignity.

In you we see a bright future for our country and for the world.

With this dedication, we honor you – today and always.

- With love from all of us who are proud to be a part of the Early Childhood Care and Development ecosystem in Bangladesh.



We imagined two young children whom we named Alia and Joy, as representing all young children in Bangladesh. Giving them names and bringing them to our meetings and workshops helped us see the world through their eyes. They became more real for us and we began to feel a greater commitment and accountability toward them. This resource pack is dedicated to the children of Bangladesh represented by Alia and Joy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Our grateful thanks to Esha Husain, Rizwan Khan, Rafi Chowdhury, Mostafizur Rahman, and Sazia Afrin (Synergos Bangladesh) for shepherding the project to produce this Leadership for Collaboration Resource Pack; To Chong-Lim Lee, Marlene Ogawa, Melissa Durda, Constance Monatla from Synergos Global and to Md. Tariqul Islam Chowdhury (Bangladesh Shishu Academy), Nahid Parvin (BRAC IED), Dr. Al Amin Bhuiyan and Zobair Alam (Centre for Injury Prevention Research, Bangladesh), Mehedi Hasan from Bangladesh ECD Network, for their support, review, guidance and ideas; To Morshed Khan for coordinating the work to compile resources and for translations to Bangla; To Andrea Rodericks for compiling and drafting this pack and co-facilitating the national level workshop; Mashrur Zaman and Zahidul Haque khan from SOMASHTE for experimenting with Bridging Leadership at the district level journalist workshops; To many others in Bangladesh who have worked alongside the Synergos team to help facilitate the Leadership for Collaboration workshops at national and district levels - Manish Srivastava (The Presencing Institute), Monira Rahman and her team from Innovations for Wellbeing Foundation, James Khakshi (BRAC Institute of Governance and Development); To many other champions in ICBC Project management, Implementing NGOs and Assistant Project Managers in Phase-I, District Children Affairs Officers (DCAOs); Bangladesh Shishu Academy, that championed the project and helped contextualise the tools; and to Expressive Communications for design and layout support. As this is a living pack of resources, we know that many others will be involved in its evolution and use.

A project of this nature can only come to life with patience, trust and resources, and we. We are grateful to Porticus Bangladesh for all of this. This resource pack is being released at an exciting time in Bangladesh in which there are renewed commitments to the children of Bangladesh by a new government in power. It is also a time of promise because of the courageous leadership and interest that the youth in Bangladesh have demonstrated in steering the future of the country. We are grateful for all their efforts and hope that this resource pack serves well those who wish to exercise collaborative leadership, no matter the sector or level at which they work.

FOREWORD

Across Bangladesh and around the world, challenges such as inequality, climate vulnerability, and the wellbeing of children and families are too complex and interconnected for any single organization or sector to address alone. At Synergos, we believe lasting solutions emerge when people and institutions build trust, bridge divides, and act with shared purpose.

Since 2018, Synergos has worked in Bangladesh to address child drowning by bringing together stakeholders from injury prevention, public health, and early childhood care and development (ECCD) around a shared vision: ensuring every child can survive and thrive. In partnership with government, civil society, researchers, development partners, and media, we helped advance an integrated approach to childcare, safety, and development while creating caregiving opportunities for local women.

A key milestone was the co-design and government approval of the Integrated Community-Based Center for Child Care, Protection, and Swim-Safe Facilities Project (ICBC Phase I), which combined drowning prevention and ECCD services in a scalable, community-based model aligned with national priorities. Its implementation required collaboration across ministries, sectors, and local administrative levels and with civil society, community and families

To support this effort, Synergos partnered with the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs and other government, NGO, and technical partners in 2023-24 to strengthen collaborative leadership through national and district workshops using Bridging Leadership tools focused on systems thinking, inner work, and collaboration.

This resource pack equips leaders with practical tools, frameworks, and insights to navigate complexity with empathy and courage. It emphasizes listening deeply, engaging inclusively, and co-creating pathways that honor individual voices and collective aspirations. As you explore these materials, I encourage you to see leadership not as a position, but as a practice of bridging differences, cultivating dialogue, and inspiring sustainable, transformative action. May this pack serve as a companion in your journey, helping you not only cross bridges, but build them as well.

Esha Husain
Country Director, Synergos Bangladesh

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Slide repository: A collection of Power point slides that may be used for some of the exercises compiled in this pack

An Invitation To A Brave Space

Together we will create brave space
Because there is no such thing as a "safe space" –
We exist in the real world
We all carry scars and we have all caused wounds.
In this space
We seek to turn down the volume of the outside world,
We amplify voices that fight to be heard elsewhere,
We call each other to more truth and love.
We have the right to start somewhere and continue to grow.
We have the responsibility to examine what we think we know.
We will not be perfect.
This space will not be perfect.
It will not always be what we wish it to be.
But
It will be our brave space together,
and
We will work on it side by side.

- By Micky ScottBey Jones



AN INTRODUCTION AND

LETTER TO THE READER OF THIS PACK

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the **Bridging Leadership for Collaboration Resource Pack!** This resource pack has been developed to celebrate and lift up leadership for collaboration in the Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) ecosystem in Bangladesh. The pack has been crafted through the commitment, collaboration and creativity of many organizations and individuals in Bangladesh and beyond, who contributed to the design and implementation of the Bangladesh government's Integrated Community Based Center for Child Care, Protection and Swim-Safe Facilities project (the ICBC project) led by the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs' (MoWCA). These organizations and individuals were from government departments, NGOs, funding organizations, the Bangladesh ECD network, and independent experts and consultants. Together they held subject area expertise in drowning prevention, health and nutrition, early childhood care and development, pre-school education, disaster management, local governance, multi-stakeholder collaboration, emergent facilitation and wellbeing promotion. We are confident that the materials here will be useful to many others beyond the ECCD space. If you are here, we imagine you have a high interest in some of these areas, or you may be interested in the power of collaboration in these complex times. No matter what brings you here, you are welcome!

Why Collaboration Matters

We live in an **increasingly complex and interconnected world which brings us many unprecedented opportunities and challenges.** Changes in distant places and sectors can deeply influence our reality - opening new paths or closing existing opportunities or ways of doing things. Unexpected changes related to climate change, the onset of a pandemic, or conflict in another country can rapidly shift our operating context in ways we never imagined. As we face constant change driven by many moving parts, single organizations find it challenging and costly to pursue their purpose alone. Organizations increasingly find the need to collaborate across sectors and with diverse kinds of entities and fields of knowledge to fulfill their purpose and potential.

Take the case of early childhood care and development (ECCD) services for young children in Bangladesh. In imagining **a future in which all young children in Bangladesh and their families have access to integrated early childhood care, development and protection services,** stakeholders were guided by the Government of Bangladesh's Comprehensive Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Policy 2013 and the globally recognized Nurturing Care Framework for Early Childhood Development. Implementing the ECCD policy suggests collaboration across 15 ministries with support from NGOs, international organizations and the private sector. Similarly, the Nurturing Care Framework intended to help children SURVIVE and THRIVE to TRANSFORM health and human potential, includes components in multiple areas calling for collaboration across many different technical fields - good health, adequate nutrition, responsive caregiving, safety and security, disaster mitigation, and opportunities for early learning. Further, making integrated ECCD services available to children in different regions of Bangladesh, or to families of different socio-economic status, or to those exposed to specific hazards, each represent unique challenges that may need context-specific solutions and types of collaboration.

Recognizing this reality, the government's ICBC

project was designed as a multi-disciplinary and cross-sectoral intervention. **It invites the participation and collaboration of ECCD stakeholders across sectors at different levels as well as family and community members, to make integrated early childhood care and development services accessible to young children in Bangladesh.** The project design prioritized a low-cost model to allow for the sustainability and scale of services in the future. In practice, this means avoiding duplication and a siloed set-up of services by different ministry verticals. Instead, it attempts to establish mechanisms for community-based childcare and swim-safe centers to connect to, and draw on other existing and emerging services, projects, resources, and creative innovations.

What does it take for so many stakeholders from different orientations, organizations and reporting structures to collaborate with each other when they have not done so before? At the start of the ICBC project, MoWCA officials, ICBC project management and their Technical Partners, including Synergos Bangladesh, recognized the **vital importance of investing in coordination and collaboration mechanisms.** These mechanisms may for example include referrals between the infrastructure of different ministries to deliver integrated services, or partnerships between government and non-government personnel to allow for context-specific adaptations. They also realized that working in such an integrated, collaborative way would **demand different ways of working and styles of leadership than that to which they were accustomed.** In 2024, Synergos and the ICBC project organized a series of workshops on Leadership for Collaboration with key stakeholders from across the ECCD ecosystem, first at national level, and then for district and upazila levels. These workshops drew from the knowledge and experience of participants and Synergos' decades-long work on cultivating "Bridging Leadership" around the world. This Resource Pack is born from these workshops and contains resources contextualized for Bangladesh. They may be useful for anyone interested in leadership for collaboration from Bangladesh and beyond, no matter which sector they work in.

Bridging Leadership

Bridging leadership is a leadership practice used by individuals and groups that has proven to be effective for building trust and collaboration among diverse stakeholders to address systemic challenges. It focuses on promoting multi-stakeholder processes to address complex social, institutional, and environmental challenges. It takes our attention beyond what we plan to do as single organizations or individuals toward greater awareness of the ecosystem of which we are a part. The ecosystem of organizations in which we interact and work have many diverse players, and are conditioned by specific dynamics, patterns, power and relationships. Building an understanding of the ecosystem helps us find ways to collectively shape it to meet our purpose. But shaping and influencing changes in an ecosystem is not easy. It demands spaces to nurture trust, engage multiple perspectives, build collective purpose and grow a culture of collaboration. This calls for a different kind of leadership than what many of us are accustomed to. This kind of leadership encourages deep listening, attention to relationships, and letting go of behaviors that do not serve our shared purpose. It requires us to tend to our own inner selves. It means doing the work to overcome our personal barriers and building the agency, power and leadership capability to collaborate to influence change.

Bridging leadership represents a significant shift in the way many of us have been taught to lead -- From command and control to embracing uncertainty, and facilitating and convening; From framing and owning the problem ourselves to understanding diverse perspectives and cultivating shared ownership and responsibility; From having all the

answers to shaping conditions in which answers emerge; From relying on our own intelligence to being champions of collective wisdom; From monopolizing power to co-creating new forms of shared power that allow for new solutions to emerge. **This kind of leadership calls for the courage to befriend uncertainty and stay with questions.** It requires trust and a belief in our collective potential. The practice of Bridging Leadership builds trust to collaborate across divides, overcoming barriers we may face as individuals or together.

"Without inner change there can be no outer change; Without collective change, no change matters." - Rev. Angel Kyodo Williams

From many years of work around the world, Synergos has found that three elements have been vital to the practice of Bridging Leadership:

Systems thinking

Creating a shared understanding of the ecosystem in which we operate, understanding it from diverse perspectives and finding leverage points for action

Inclusive collaboration

Finding ways to work together, including with those who have different perspectives or who are usually at the margins of our ecosystems, to leverage our collective resources and build enabling and powerful relationships that serve our collective purpose

Inner work and self-care

Increasing self-awareness, taking care of our wellbeing and paying attention to our inner worlds (individually and with others in a safe setting) to overcome obstacles, fear or pain that may prevent us from being our best in the world.

The purpose of this pack and intended audience

This Resource Pack has been prepared for ICBC project functionaries, practitioners, facilitators, policy makers, researchers in the ECCD space in Bangladesh at every level. It is a compilation of key ideas, frameworks, methods and stories related to the themes above that may be used to nurture better leadership for collaboration. The resources in the pack have been drawn from multiple sources and adapted for use in the ICBC project's Leadership for Collaboration workshops.

While these resources were tested in the ECCD space, they may be easily adapted for use beyond the ECCD ecosystem to benefit other sectors attempting multi-stakeholder collaboration around complex challenges. They may be used to prepare leadership and collaboration workshops or embed short practices in day-to-day meetings to help enhance collaboration. The pack also contains resources for inner work. You may use these practices individually or in groups, to build self-awareness and to aid your own healing, reflection, rest and growth to help resource yourself to show up with courage, clarity and creativity.

Facilitation is an important facet of cultivating Bridging Leadership. It is a different kind of facilitation to the role of a trainer in a technical training program or the role we sometimes play in meetings, guiding people through a set of agenda items in an organized manner. **This kind of facilitation is focused on cultivating and holding a trusting space often filled with uncertainty, but in which something new may emerge.** This resource pack includes materials to support those who wish to discover and practice this role of a facilitator of emergent processes.

PRINCIPLES AT THE HEART OF THIS PACK

The path of practicing Bridging Leadership for collaboration is not always easy. We are finding it helpful to hold on to a few principles as we navigate our journey through the challenges and dilemmas that come our way. We have tried to hold these principles at the core of our practice, and they have served as a helpful guide in facilitating the Leadership for Collaboration workshops for the ICBC project. We hope they will help you too, as you walk this path.

Head, Heart, Hands

Recognizing that our decisions in life are shaped by the powerful combination of thinking, feeling, and doing, we engage not only our intellect, but our whole selves, intentionally drawing on our emotional and somatic[1] intelligence and practical actions to guide us. In practice this means going beyond a focus on rational thought to trying to understand our inner condition, paying attention to our bodies, listening deeply beyond just words to sense emotions, and crafting short experiments to try out new ideas. In each workshop and meeting that we facilitate, we attempt to strike a balance between these elements.

Children at the center

We commit to always keeping the interest of young children at the heart of our work. In practice, when we face dilemmas, or when our discussions become conflictual, we draw our focus back to children to inspire us to stay true to purpose. To help do this, we have images of two children, Joy and Alia, to whom we have dedicated this pack. We frequently bring them to our meetings and conversations to inspire us and give us the courage to always do what is best for them.

A systems approach

We use attention to the wider system as a key element in our work to practice Bridging Leadership, and as a principle. As a principle, it means taking every opportunity to build a shared understanding and visibility of the ECCD ecosystem and its dynamics at various levels, reminding ourselves that we do not operate in a vacuum. As we shape our collaboration, we especially draw attention to actors and resources that may add value, but are currently at the margins or do not have power in the ecosystem.

Trust as a foundation for collaboration

Trust is the cornerstone of Bridging Leadership. A key role of a Bridging Leader is to cultivate trust between diverse groups of people to take collective action toward a shared purpose. In holding it as a principle, we attempt to infuse it in all our actions, cultivating an atmosphere of trust, and aiming to be trustworthy ourselves. We do this by being authentic in our actions and being true to our word.

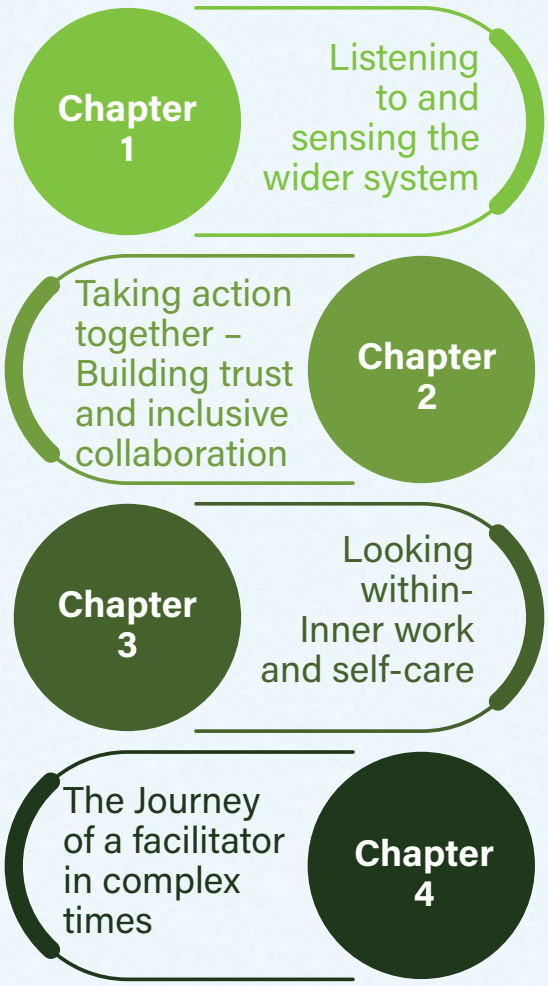
Uncertainty and not knowing

We accept that in the complex contexts of our work, solutions to many of the problems we encounter are not already known. New solutions emerge through our collaboration which brings our different perspectives, experiences, and expertise together. This requires us to be willing to be in the uncomfortable space of not knowing and being open to what may emerge between us. We hold this as a principle in our practice and in our facilitation so that we do not fall back on the pursuit of certainty, that we have learned from traditional management training and cultural expectations.

[1]Somatic intelligence refers to the body's innate wisdom – an awareness of internal physical sensations (like gut feelings, muscle tension, breath) that provide deeper understanding and guidance beyond purely logical thought, helping you stay grounded, present, and make aligned decisions, especially under stress. You can read more about somatic intelligence at https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/somatic-intelligence-rising-beyond-emotional-hatem-j-alabki/

How the pack is organized and how to use it

This resource pack includes four chapters followed by a small set of facilitation guides and other resources. Each of the first three chapters focus attention on one of the elements of Bridging Leadership described above. The fourth chapter is a resource for those wishing to embark on the journey of a facilitator supporting groups in navigating complex contexts. Each chapter includes: An introduction to the focus theme and its relevance for Bridging Leadership; A short description of some relevant frameworks and tools that help us better understand and build competencies related to this theme; and A few examples that demonstrate the use of these frameworks and tools in the ICBC project's Leadership for Collaboration workshops. Embedded in the four chapters are a few practice boxes. These are opportunities for the reader to try out micro practices or reflect briefly on the subject of the chapter.



The content in each chapter is designed to stand on its own. A reader may dive into any chapter, depending on their interest and need. However, we have learned that Bridging Leadership for collaboration does take combined effort and skill in systems change, inclusive collaboration and inner work.

The annexes that follow contain facilitation guides for some of the methods tested in the ICBC Project's Leadership for Collaboration workshops. In addition, the pack contains a few other suggested resources and references to support readers and users on their journey of strengthening leadership for collaboration.

While these resources can support your journey in practicing Bridging Leadership and inviting others to this practice, it is important to remember that the practice of collaborative leadership is not a technical concept. No one can offer us a step-by-step guide on how to become a Bridging Leader. It is a practice and way of being that we learn, grow into, and cultivate over time. We invite you to be patient with yourselves and with each other. And, trust the process.

With love and gratitude,
The Synergos Bangladesh Team.

When our hearts are small…
We can't accept or tolerate others
and their shortcomings,
and we demand that they change.
But when our hearts expand…
We accept others as they are,
and then they have a chance to
transform.

-Thich Nhat Hanh

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF

BRIDGING LEADERSHIP

Solutions to social problems are too often built in silos. Our approach—centered on bridging leadership—helps diverse stakeholders **build trust and collaborate across divides** to co-create more tailored, durable interventions.



SYSTEMS THINKING

- Using proven tools to look at social problems from diverse perspectives, analyzing them systemically
- Selecting leverage points for action

INNER WORK AND SELF CARE

- Increasing awareness of the self, others, and the larger system
- Aligning individual intentions for authentic action
- Self care and removing personal obstacles to effectiveness as a leader

BRIDGING AND INCLUSIVE COLLABORATION

- Working with key stakeholders to leverage collective resources and action
- Building sustainable relationships that can carry the partnership forward



Chapter 1

Listening to and sensing the wider system

An Elephant in the Dark

Some Hindus have an elephant to show.
No one here has ever seen an elephant.
They bring it at night to a dark room.

One by one, we go in the dark and come out
saying how we experience the animal.
One of us happens to touch the trunk.
A water-pipe kind of creature.

Another, the ear. A very strong, always moving
back and forth, fan-animal. Another, the leg.
I find it still, like a column on a temple.

Another touches the curved back.
A leathery throne. Another the cleverest,
feels the tusk. A rounded sword made of porcelain.
He is proud of his description.

Each of us touches one place
and understands the whole that way.
The palm and the fingers feeling in the dark
are how the senses explore the reality of the elephant.

If each of us held a candle there,
and if we went in together, we could see it.

Poem by Rumi,
Translated by Coleman Barks



INTRODUCTION AND

WHY SYSTEMS THINKING

Meeting our commitment of helping children across Bangladesh survive and thrive to transform health and human potential in these volatile times is no simple matter. There is no formula that if applied, will automatically lead to the outcomes we want. We each may have the experience of various technical strategies and approaches that have worked in the past, but as our world has become more interconnected and complex, the challenges and opportunities we face have evolved and are influenced by patterns that none of us can predict or control. Indeed, it makes no sense for a single organization or ministry to provide the full range of integrated ECCD services, and no one agency is likely to have the resources and expertise to do so.

We have also seen that we often encounter significant change in our contexts, sometimes quite rapidly, and we are faced with a new reality. Our recent experiences with the Covid pandemic, with increased intensity and frequency of climate related and other disasters, and from the recent political upheaval in Bangladesh are examples of this. We know that the strategies and ways of working from the past may no longer serve us well in this shifting reality and we search for new ways of thinking, acting and being that can help us navigate these shifts to address these emerging challenges of our time. This does not mean that the expertise that we have is not useful, but rather, that we possibly have to bring together many different kinds of expertise, intelligences and perspectives to be able to innovate in real time in order to achieve the outcomes we seek. And, we have to be more comfortable with uncertainty and not having the answers upfront.

It is this kind of collaboration that our Comprehensive ECCD Policy 2013 and the Nurturing Care Framework call for. However, most of our professional practices were created for simpler times and have remained relatively unchanged for a long time. They have shaped our work culture. The practice of Bridging Leadership which promotes multi-stakeholder processes to address complex social, institutional and environmental challenges, can help us grow more collaborative and agile practices better suited to these times. A Bridging



Leader does not only interpret and address challenges s/he encounters from within an organization or her/ his assigned role. S/he also pays attention to what is occurring between and across organizations, institutions, groups of people, and possibly across multiple levels. The concept of Bridging Leadership is described in greater detail in the Introduction to this resource pack and the resource list at the end of each chapter includes additional materials for those wishing to learn more.

A key element in Bridging Leadership is systems thinking – embodying ways of thinking, acting and being that embrace complexity and invite collaboration to influence deep and transformative change across a system. This requires widening our perspective and worldview beyond our own silos, responsibilities, experiences and realm of control to understand and interact with the wider system of interconnected people, organizations, and

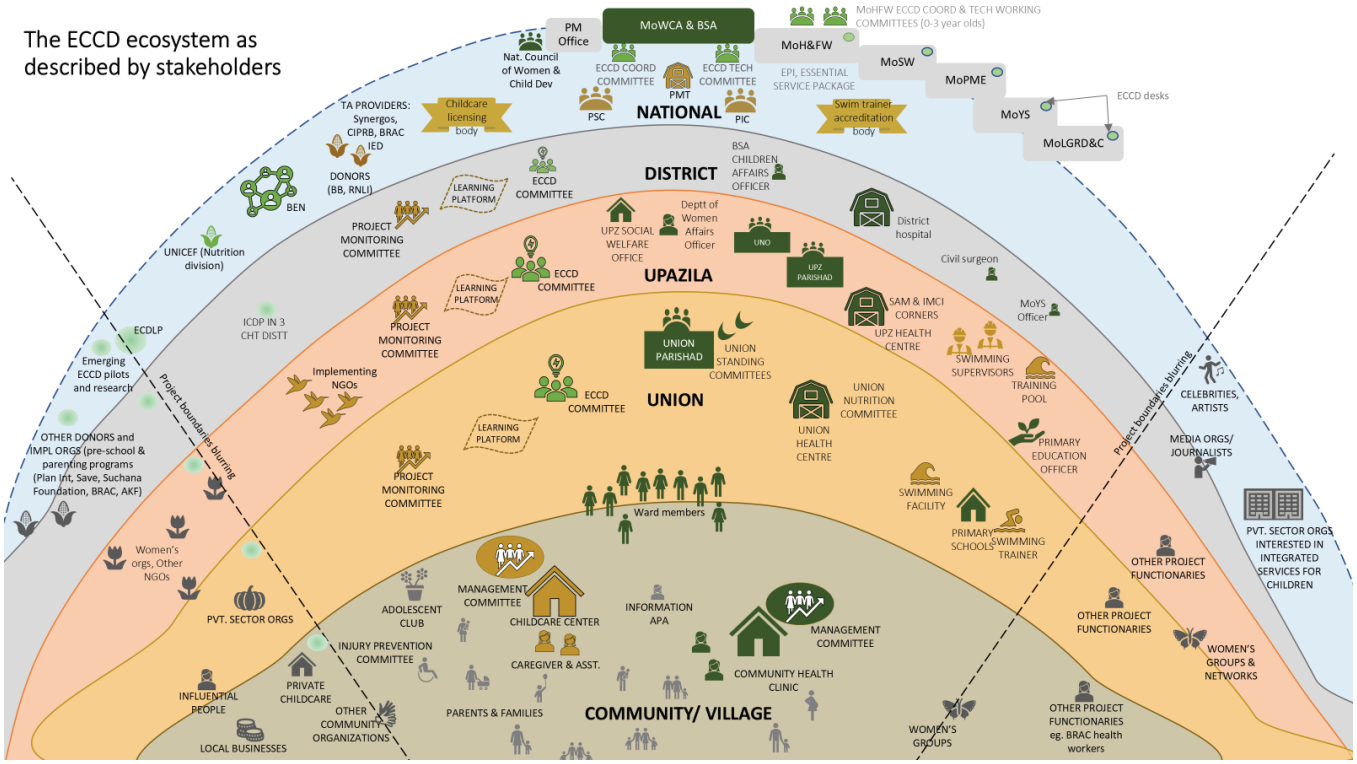
institutions working on ECCD. We observe this way of seeing and relating all the time in the natural world, in the behavior of a colony of ants, a school of fish or a murmuration of starlings as they collectively react to changes in their surroundings in relationship with each other, and often moving with collective purpose. We humans too are interconnected in this way and can build greater awareness of our connections to move with shared collective purpose.

> **Practice:** *If you have a few minutes, you may like to watch this video (Flight of the Starlings produced by National Geographic), and imagine yourself as a starling in this murmuration, moving and gliding in relation to others around you. You may find this kind of practice of imagining yourself as another creature to be strange. But sometimes our imagination can help us do extraordinary things.*

But what is a system? For Donella Meadows, one of the pioneers of Systems Thinking, **'a system is a set of things — people, cells, molecules or whatever — interconnected in such a way that they produce their own pattern of behaviour over time'**. For the purposes of the ICBC project, the system in which we are interested is the ECCD ecosystem in Bangladesh at different levels, which offers us a wide enough umbrella to bring in multiple actors and institutions associated with all the aspects of nurturing care for young children. We can then understand this ecosystem together – its key actors, their relationships, the nature of power in the system, resource flows, patterns of behavior. With this understanding we can imagine the kind of changes we may wish to influence in this system. The picture on the next page is an early attempt on the part of those who designed the ICBC project to depict the various actors in the ECCD ecosystem. Mapping actors in this way is messy, but helps us build collective understanding and have coherent conversations about various qualities we wish to understand and influence in the system.

In trying to influence a system, **defining the boundaries of the system is an essential part of the work.** The work to design the ICBC project, initially began with the key focus on preventing drowning of young children and hence we paid attention to a limited set of actors associated with this purpose. Expanding the boundaries to the wider ECCD ecosystem was a strategic choice to gather the greatest support and most promising outcomes for young children in Bangladesh. When our system boundaries are clear, we can begin to understand how the system functions. For this, we go beyond identifying actors at different levels, to exploring various qualities of the system. We try to get a sense of how the different elements in the system interact to create patterns that may help or create barriers to achieving the purpose we seek. **Building this kind of collective understanding can help us imagine how we may work together to leverage change.** But this is hard work. The systems of which we are a part include a collection of quite diverse actors with different perspectives of the system and its patterns, and diverse ideas for change. How we each understand and interpret the system may be quite different from the way other actors do. This diversity makes it challenging, and this is also where opportunity lies to navigate uncertainty and complex challenges.

Just like in the story of the elephant in the dark at the start of this chapter, how each of us understands the ECCD ecosystem is a function of other systems of which we are (or have been) a part. If we can cultivate a collective understanding of the system with its inherent patterns and contradictions, opportunities and challenges, we could build a shared purpose to work towards. This will **require us to be curious, to listen to each other, to be willing to step out of the comfort zone of our own knowledge and ways of thinking, to sincerely try to understand different perspectives, and to be open to imagining**



what could emerge through our collaboration. That is what we tried to do in the ICBC Leadership for Collaboration workshops. We describe here some frameworks and tools that are proving to be useful on this journey.

"We don't see the world as it is, we see the world as we are."
- Anais Nin



USEFUL FRAMEWORKS

Beyond embracing the idea of systems thinking, we need to build **skills to grow systems awareness, which is a key competency for Bridging Leaders.** Fortunately for us, there already are several frameworks to help us do this. In exploring collaboration for the ICBC project, we referred to some of these in designing our workshop sessions. These include **the Iceberg Model,** Donella Meadows' **"Places to Intervene in a System"**, Kania, Kramer and Senge's **"Six interdependent conditions of systems change"**, and Otto Scharmer's **"Levels of listening".** We briefly explore these in this chapter. Systems thinking is an important element in Bridging Leadership because it is inherently suited to complexity and addressing complex challenges. These are not the only types of challenges we encounter. It is therefore important that we are able to recognize complexity when we encounter it. We include here a brief description of the **Cynefin framework** that helps us distinguish between the realms of Simple, Complicated, Complex, and Chaotic. Do not be put off by the number of frameworks being introduced here. We invite you to explore them slowly. It is not necessary that everyone engaged in systems change has a deep knowledge of all these frameworks. You can dip into them lightly, and learn by doing as we did. However, if you are looking to dive in more deeply into this work, some of these frameworks may clarify and inspire your journey.

We also explore in this chapter some tools we used in the methodology of our workshop sessions to cultivate capability for systems awareness and to identify points of leverage in the system. These are **"3D modeling," "Dialogue Walks," and "Stepping into the shoes."** The annex to this Resource Pack contains detailed facilitation guides for the use of some of these tools from our workshops.

Understanding the system - The Iceberg Model[2]

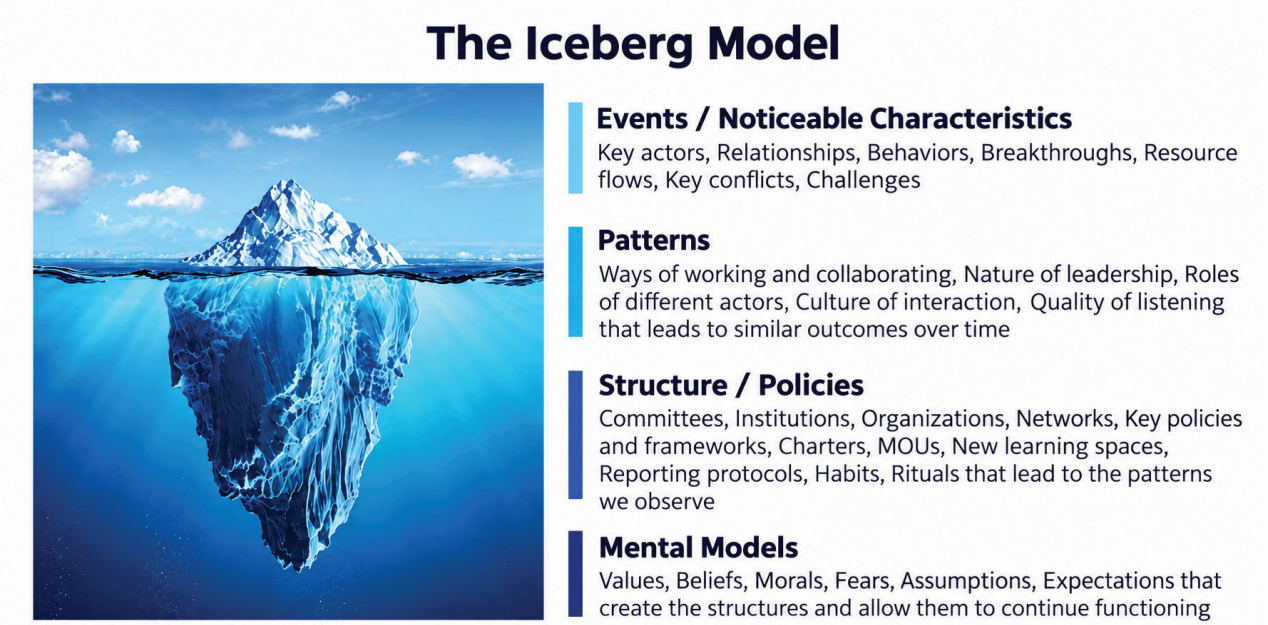
The metaphor of an iceberg gives us a useful framework to understand systems. Only 10-20% of an iceberg is visible to us above the water, The remaining 80-90% is below the water line and not visible as we approach it from the surface. Much of what we observe on the tip of an iceberg is caused by the mass that ocean currents act on under the water. This is not unlike systems of which we are a part. We see problems or notice events and changes on the surface, but if we try to respond to them without understanding the underlying causes, we may end up perpetuating or worsening the problem we want to address. The iceberg model guides us to go deeper, to look at the recurring patterns, quality of relationships, structures, beliefs and values that lie under the surface that may not be visible at first. A conversation among diverse actors in the system using some of these deeper levels of the iceberg model can help build a more complete picture of the system to begin to imagine how change may occur toward a collective purpose.

The iceberg model describes an iceberg in four layers, most of them under the surface, as shown in the diagram below. By focusing our attention on each level, we can create a better understanding of what drives the system. This helps us uncover points from which we can leverage change. In using the iceberg model, **we can focus on a particular challenge we face and ask ourselves questions deeper and deeper in the iceberg,** such as, "What kinds of events and decisions may have contributed to this challenge? What are some patterns or trends we observe over time that may be contributing to these events? What kinds of structures have contributed to building these patterns? What beliefs

[2]If you find thinking about an iceberg is unfamiliar for those of us who live in warmer climates, you may consider using a tree with an extensive root system

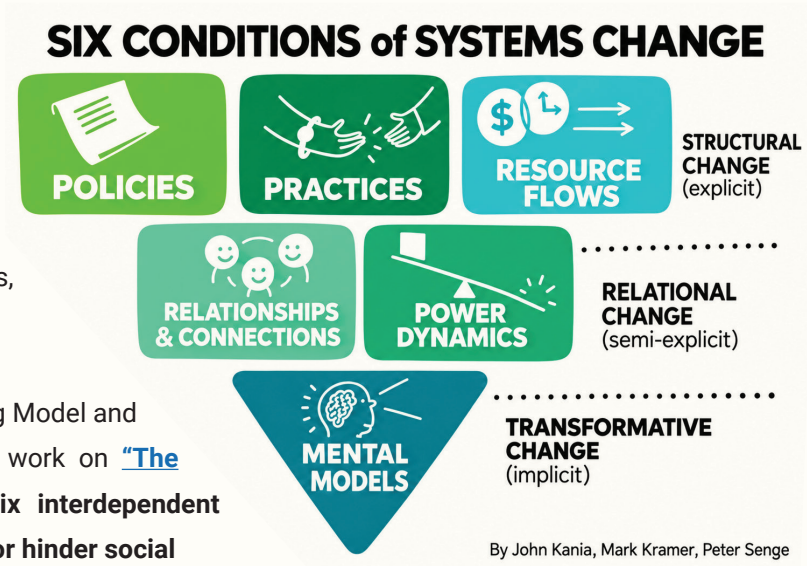
and values underlie these structures and allow them to continue functioning?

The iceberg model reminds us that complex problems cannot be addressed by merely treating the symptoms or making adjustments at the event level. If we better understand patterns that show up at multiple parts of the system and the structures that support them, it is more likely that we will be able to uncover some of the driving beliefs and values that hold the challenge in place. This lowest level is the most challenging layer to shift in the system, since our mental models and beliefs are so ingrained in us and they unconsciously drive our everyday choices and assumptions. However, **challenging our beliefs and mindsets offer one of the most transformative ways to shift a system.** Getting to this depth requires us to be open and willing to listen to different perspectives from across the system.



Influencing the system

Even if we collectively understand the patterns in the system and what drives them, how may we influence change? How do we make choices on where to intervene for greater likelihood of success? [Donella Meadows' work on "Places to intervene in a system"] helps us explore places in the system where a small shift in one thing may produce big changes across the system. Her framework gives us ideas for a range of possible leverage points in increasing order of effectiveness from small interventions like attention to resource flows and practices, to more effective levers of change such as creating feedback loops and shifting the rules or goals of the system, as well as more challenging and even more effective levers, such as mindset or paradigm shifts.



Kania, Kramer and Senge build on the Iceberg Model and Donella Meadows' leverage points in their work on ["The Water of Systems Change,"] to explore **six interdependent conditions of systems change that support or hinder social**

change. These conditions include: Structural change (policies, practices, resource flows), Relational change (relationships and connections, power dynamics), Transformative change (mental models). This work aims to clarify what it means to shift these conditions in order to influence systems change, particularly for those working toward more equitable systems. It takes the user through a set of guided questions and reflections, including their own contributions to the 'stuckness' of these conditions, to identify strategies for change.

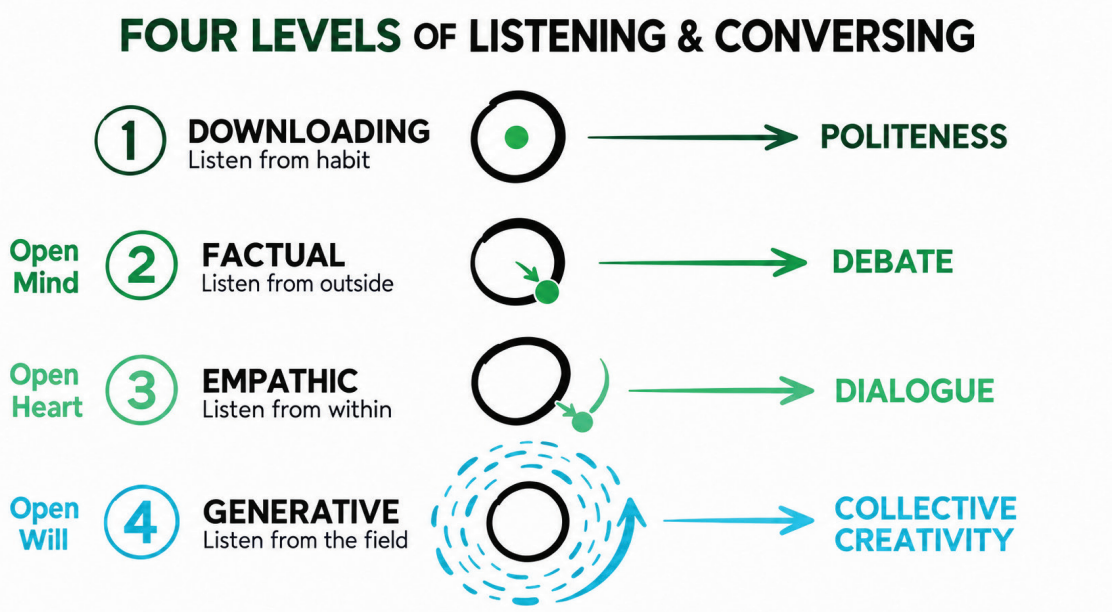
Practice: *Take some time (on your own or with others) to reflect on an ecosystem of which you are a part, in which you would like to see some change. Try to describe the boundaries of the system, noting key actors within, and actors at the edges. Draw a diagram or make a model of the ecosystem that best represents its qualities from your perspective.*

Now use the picture of the iceberg above to try to describe the ecosystem – key events and notable characteristics, some defining patterns, structures and policies, and mental models and beliefs that drive the system. Make notes. If you are with others, make sure everyone has a chance to contribute. Note where there is agreement and/ or divergence in your experience of the ecosystem. Where do you sense energy for change? Where do you sense the system is stuck?

Levels of listening

Actively seeking and listening to perspectives that are different from our own is a prerequisite to building systems awareness. **Listening is at the heart of collaborative leadership, and is an essential skill for Bridging Leaders.** There are many different frameworks and tools to help us improve the quality of our listening. For the Leadership for Collaboration workshops with the ICBC project, we drew on two such frameworks, Non-Violent Communication (which we explore in Chapter 2) and Levels of Listening from **Theory U, a framework,** approach and practice for systems change developed by Otto Scharmer.

Theory U explores four levels of listening that are useful in our collaboration journey. The first is listening by **downloading** where you primarily focus on your own thoughts and judgements, just listening to reconfirm what you already think you know. The black circles in the diagram represent the totality of what we each know and the green dot is the place from where we listen. In this level of listening, the focus of our attention is inside what we already know. The second level is **factual listening.** We listen to the facts primarily to notice what may be different from what we know. This kind of listening can be powerful if done with an open mind. It is used in good science to notice information that conflicts with our own or to confirm assumptions or to debate on a subject. However, this is not good enough for complex social processes as we remain anchored in our existing knowledge and blind spots. The third level of listening is **empathic listening,** which involves listening with an open heart to see the situation through the eyes of another. We listen in this way when we are involved in genuine dialogue. This type of listening opens an emotional connection, and the focus of our attention is the person who is speaking. The fourth and deepest level is **generative or creative listening**, which involves listening with an open will, not only to the person as they are in the current moment, but to their intent (and our own), and to future possibilities. It requires us to listen to our field of interaction and to what is emerging between us – our highest future possibility. At the end of this conversation we sense that we are no longer the same people as we were when we began, and it opens space to imagine a different future. In this type of listening, we connect to a deeper sense of knowing. By noticing our level of listening in the



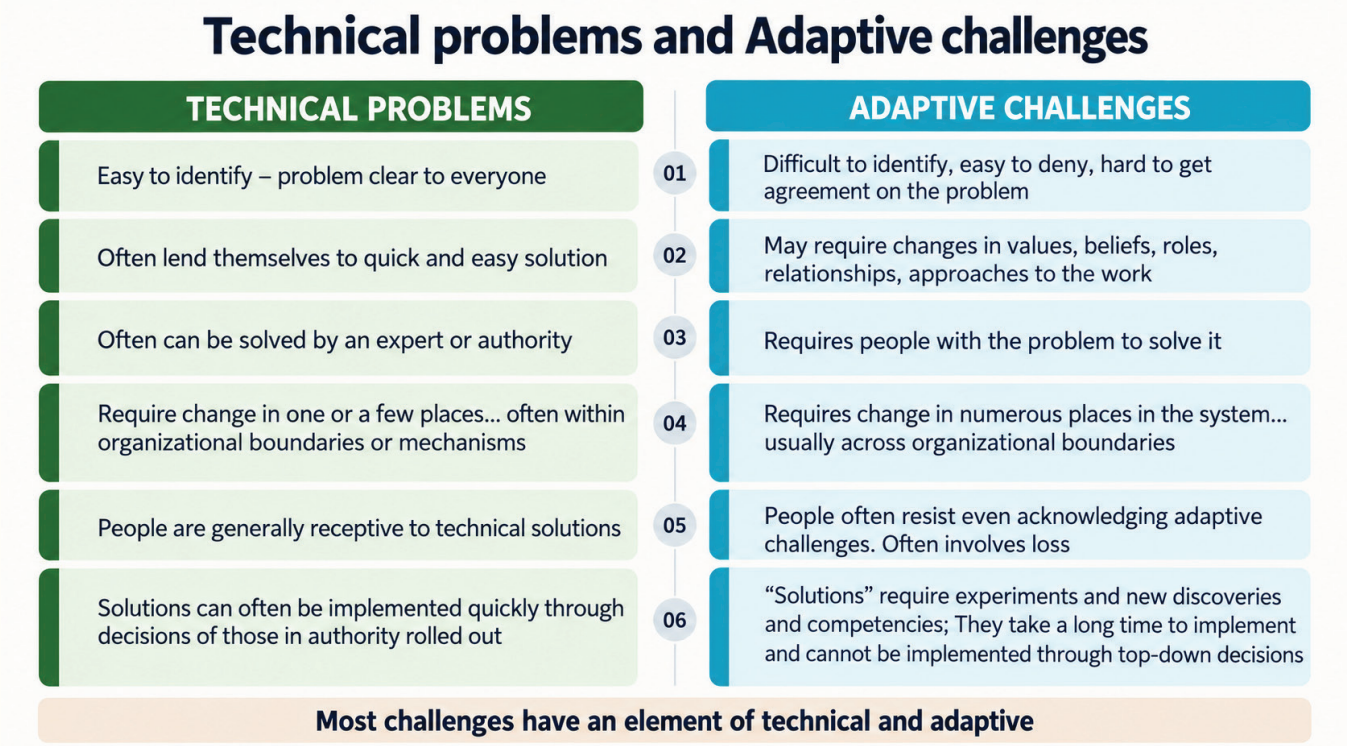
moment, we can practice getting to deeper levels of listening by shifting the focus of our attention. This can help us deepen our collaboration. You can listen to a short video from Synergos on these levels of listening here- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I__3tols1l0&list=PLuEa_3bpLTOMbBFr9z0xDcUG2UUXS93nU&index=8. Even though it is easy to intellectually understand the differences in these levels of listening, it takes practice and work on ourselves to shift the focus of our attention to the field around us. Some of the methods and practices for inner work described in Chapter 3 of this pack may be helpful in our journey as they may help us build self-awareness.

Complexity, technical problems and adaptive challenges

Before you dive deep into systems thinking, it may be useful to consider when it is most useful. Every challenge we encounter may not demand systems thinking or a Bridging Leadership approach. For example, if the light fixture in your office is broken, you can just get the help of an electrician or someone with electrical knowledge and the right tools to fix it. It does not call for us to necessarily understand how all the stakeholders in the electricity provision ecosystem work. This is because the problem is clear to anyone who is involved; The solution is known, and technical skills to address the problem are available. If we need help, it should not be too difficult to explain what we are trying to do and request assistance. It is within our control to make a plan and take action to solve the problem. And it is obvious to anyone involved when the problem is fixed. This was a technical problem.

However, when we are operating in uncertain or changing contexts and there are problems created by many moving parts (some of them distant), everyone involved may see the problem differently from where they sit, and at different points in time. Any plan a single person or organization creates on their own may quickly become redundant because the system is unpredictable and not understood in the same way by everyone involved. Opportunities for change emerge through the interactions of various elements, actors, and bodies of knowledge in the system. **These are some of the markers of complexity and these kinds of challenges** are adaptive challenges. Offering integrated child care, development and protection services to children and their families in the many different contexts in Bangladesh poses this kind of challenge.

In such situations, we may need to approach the problem differently. We cannot draw on ready-made solutions that work for every context and combination of actors involved, and we may not be able to understand in advance which opportunities are most promising. Therefore, it may be more effective for us to agree on a shared purpose, some

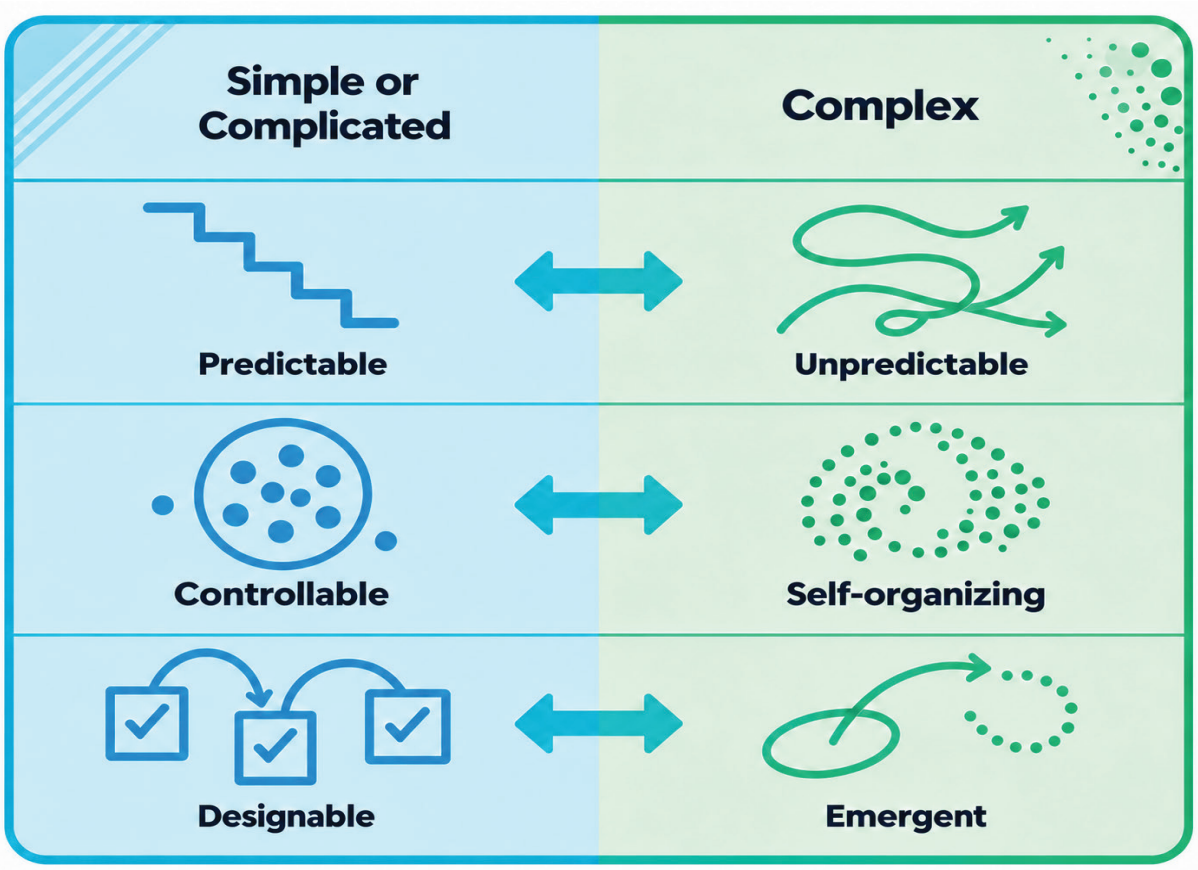


key directions, and principles, and then undertake a few experiments together to try to address the challenge at hand. To do this, the way we plan our work will be different – rather than developing a predetermined detailed activity plan to roll out everywhere, we may focus on building purposeful relationships and ways of collaborating and learning together to innovate around the shared purpose in different contexts to address the adaptive challenge we face.

Bridging leadership is especially effective in complex contexts to address adaptive challenges. It helps us draw on our diverse experiences, knowledge, and perspectives to address the challenge at hand. But we first must be able to recognize complexity and the difference between technical and adaptive challenges. The table above identifies some markers to help us do this. Understanding the nature of the challenge at hand can also be helpful in determining our own role and path in leading change. For example, understanding the kind of challenge we face will help us decide when we may take action alone, and when collaboration is important; It can help us decide when to share expert knowledge and when to facilitate a space for new solutions to emerge. This kind of understanding helps us be more effective in leading change.

For those interested in learning more about complexity, the **Cynefin framework** is a conceptual model to help us identify complexity and aid decision making by focusing on the relationship between cause and effect. The framework categorizes challenges into four domains – simple, complicated, complex, and chaotic. We can tailor the nature of our response by understanding the domain in which a challenge is situated. We do not explore the Cynefin framework in detail in this resource pack, however, for those interested, a useful starting place for Bridging Leaders is to try to understand the difference between "complicated" and "complex" systems. We often use these terms interchangeably, but they are not the same. The distinction matters because they demand different types of leadership. If we try to intervene in a complex system with tools developed for simple or complicated systems, we may fail, or we may be blind to many opportunities because we rely largely on already established rules and solutions instead of listening for new possibilities that may emerge. Intervening purposefully in complex systems

demands flexibility, experimentation, and the ability to learn by doing. Solutions emerge through the self-organization and interaction of different actors and outcomes rather than through a set of top-down instructions and rules.





PROMISING
TOOLS AND METHODS

Having explored some of the guiding frameworks, we now move our attention to some tools and methods we used in the ICBC project in cultivating systems attention.

3D mapping

3D mapping is a tool or process that is used to surface multiple perspectives to understand how a situation or system may evolve. It also serves as a good systems mapping tool. In this process, a mixed group of participants representing different parts of the system work together to create a sculpture that they believe represents the current state of the system. In creating their sculpture, they listen to each other's perspectives and use available material to create a representation of the system. They are encouraged to go beyond simply representing the various actors of the system to exploring the nature of connections between different actors, how resources flow, where they imagine opportunities and challenges lie, and where there may be readiness for change, and where not.

The group then examines the system from four different directions to reflect on what the sculpture is telling them, and to sense and imagine what it could look like in future. These four directions are intended to help us access a deeper level of reflection, going beyond thinking to: **Feeling** – what they love and what frustrates them; **Sensing** hard truths that need to be spoken and may require courage; **Voicing** and honoring perspectives on what is ending or needs to die and what they observe wants to be born in the system; and Uncovering places in the system to potentially intervene to influence change. They then attempt to adjust or **rebuild the sculpture to depict a possible future system that takes them closer to their purpose.** The power of this practice lies in participants using their hands and creative energy to imagine the system, rather than habitual ways of thinking and using words alone to communicate. Through 3D mapping they draw on multiple faculties to listen generatively, and understand and build on each other's ideas and perspectives. This opens space for creativity and discovering new insights and connections. It also invites a degree of playfulness as participants search for objects and artefacts of different shapes and textures to represent the system. In this exercise, people often



find themselves being much more expressive, using their hands, movement, changes in their voice to describe the system. When combined with practicing deeper levels of listening, this is a very powerful methodology. It helps to build a shared understanding of the system, communicate our perspectives on it, and imagine a future that may be possible through collaboration. Annex 5 of this resource pack includes a facilitation guide for this exercise.

Dialogue walk

A dialog walk is a method we use with participants to practice deeper listening. Two individuals **explore a question in a deep conversation while walking, preferably outdoors, each taking a turn as story teller and as listener.** They practice authentic sharing and deep listening, and try to understand



each other's perspectives and experience on a topic. It is a versatile method that may be used at different parts of a participatory workshop or meeting. In debriefing, facilitators invite participants to share insights generated in response to the question, as well as to reflect on the roles of listening and storytelling to sharpen these skills. For this exercise, it is helpful to frame a calling question to explore that may be important to people - something that may connect to their core purpose - something that they may not have an opportunity to share in their regular work practice. Annex 1 of this resource pack includes a facilitation guide for this exercise.

Stepping into the shoes of another

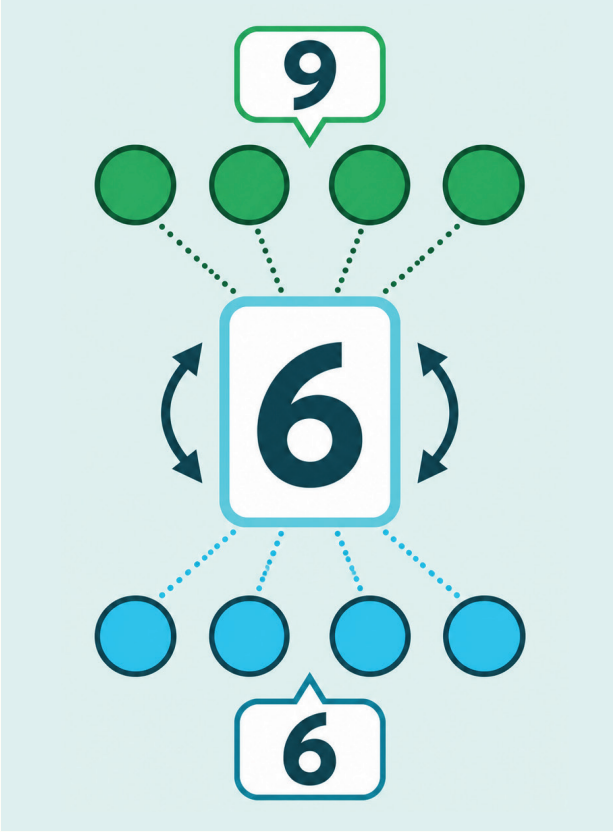
This is a sensing method that helps us to see another's perspective by putting ourselves in their shoes. It can be used to help us better understand the system from the perspective of those who may not be in the room. It may also be used to test promising ideas from different viewpoints. The group selects a range of stakeholders whose perspectives they believe are important to the work at hand. Their footprints are drawn and placed on the floor, and participants are invited (one at a time) to physically step into their footprints – consciously stand on them and feel into their role as that person with their whole body. They are then encouraged to speak out as the voice of the person whose shoes they are in, using the first person (an I-statement)…. For example, "My highest hope from this project is…", or "My biggest concern that holds me back is…", or "What I wish others could understand about me is…". These insights can inform the work at hand. In addition, feeling and voicing the perspective of another offers a more empathic connection to them that may stay long after the exercise is done. For the



ICBC project Leadership for Collaboration workshops, at different points in our process, we considered doing this exercise to bring the perspective of childcare centre caregivers and families of children into the room.

Is it a 6 or a 9?

An important prerequisite for understanding systems and thinking systemically, is being open to perspectives that are different to our own. The 6-9 game is a simple eye-opener reminding us of the value of seeing things from another's perspective. For this exercise, participants are divided into two teams and stand in two lines facing each other. On the floor between the two lines is a card with a large '6' written on it. To one team it appears as a six. To the team on the other side, it appears as a nine. The facilitator gets participants to declare what is on the card and may ask which team has the right answer. S/he may ask teams to switch sides and declare again what is written on the card. This is a simple way to provoke a discussion on the value of paying attention to another's perspective.



APPLYING FRAMEWORKS AND TOOLS IN THE ICBC PROJECT

We included dialog walks early in the Leadership for Collaboration workshops as a way to introduce and practice levels of listening, and to shape a tone and culture of listening deeply to each other. In pairs, participants responded to the prompt: "Share a moment or experience from your work life when you went beyond the call of duty to partner with others for a higher purpose." We encouraged them to speak from the heart, to share not only what they did, but how they experienced or felt during the event, and try to communicate what was important to them in the moment. We invited listeners to try to get to deeper levels of listening and to be aware of their experience in doing so. Throughout the workshop we returned to these levels of listening and reminders to continue to share more of ourselves with each other.



As we began to prepare the Leadership for Collaboration workshops, we introduced a group of Champions for the

initiative to some of these frameworks and tools. We used the iceberg model to shape a visioning exercise in which participants imagined a successful and regenerative future ECCD ecosystem in which their shared purpose and commitment to the children of Bangladesh had been fulfilled. Then, returning to the present, the exercise took participants through a series of prompts to dig deeper to the different levels of the iceberg to imagine what patterns, what structures and what mental models were preventing change or holding the existing system in place.



In the Leadership for Collaboration workshops at National and District level, we used a 3d mapping exercise with participants to map the ECCD system and explore its qualities. Participants did this using craft supplies, lego blocks, stones, leaves and anything they could find. They shared what they loved about the system, and in the safe space of the workshop, they found the courage to speak about challenges and hard truths. Together they imagined how they could shape a future for children across Bangladesh to survive, thrive and transform their health and human potential.



The tools we selected for our work are not the only tools at our disposal. The field is rich in guidance to help anyone interested in cultivating systems awareness or exploring leverage points for change in a system. However, more important than having the right tools is cultivating an awareness and curiosity about the systems of which we are part, especially as seen from the eyes of others in the system.

Practice: *Find a quiet space to reflect on a system of which you are a part --- Close your eyes and think about the different parts of the system and how they interact. You may think about some things that are going well and some challenges. Put yourself in the system and be still. What does it feel like? Where do you feel it in your body? What colors, what shapes, what sensation does it invoke in you? What are you curious about?*

A reflection from the facilitators designing the set of Bridging Leadership workshops for the ICBC project…

We used the iceberg model to reflect on how we may create a space for participants that was welcoming, where participants would feel safe enough, but also where they would find the courage to collectively explore deep collaboration. We wanted the workshop itself to exemplify a different kind of power and innovative ways of collaborating. The reality was that most multi-sectoral meetings and events, especially those attended by senior government officials, demonstrated visible power differences and passive participation from those considered to have less power in the system. This was perpetuated in meetings through expectations around protocols, seating arrangements, and agenda formats that re-emphasized power differences. Underlying this were beliefs that those who held more responsibility in government structures should be allowed greater influence in all spaces of interaction.

We thought about changes we could make to invite participants to a different kind of experience, while still showing respect for participant expectations, culture, and ways of working. Some of these changes included: Two seating arrangements for different kinds of sessions, one that supported an elevated stage for speeches and another circular more inclusive arrangement; Adding a session in addition to the formal opening to welcome all participants equally in a loving way with flowers; Encouraging people to introduce themselves beyond their official roles and positions, as parents, sisters, neighbors, artists; Including mindfulness practices to cultivate greater self-awareness; Designing evening activities that helped participants share more of themselves with each other through poetry, art, song, building camaraderie and trust.

Systems thinking is a powerful part of Bridging Leadership. Once you embark on this journey, it is bound to open many new ways to think about things in many facets of life and work. But it is a challenging journey. It invites us to be open to change and different perspectives, some of which may be uncomfortable; It calls us to look within ourselves to what comes in the way of our own collaboration and best contributions in the system. This requires us to strengthen ourselves, to actively cultivate trust, and to build common purpose with others. The chapters that follow focus on these themes.

If you are done reading this chapter and have a few minutes, spend some time listening to Hok Kolorab by the Bangladeshi singer Arnob, in which he celebrates diversity, harmony, a sense of community, and challenges the conventional way of looking at things around us.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

A guide to actor mapping from FSG
https://www.fsg.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Guide-to-Actor-Mapping.pdf

Brief description of the iceberg model, a blog by Courage Egbude “Systems Thinking: The Iceberg model”
https://medium.com/design-bootcamp/systems-thinking-the-iceberg-model-6294bc5346f0

Videos
Peggy Dulany, founder of Synergos explains systems thinking through the story of the elephant
https://www.synergos.org/news-and-insights/2018/video-what-systems-thinking-peggy-dulany

John Tomlinson of Synergos: Systems Thinking: Understanding the whole rather than just separate pieces
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h-93TWReWdY&list=PLuEa_3bpLTOMbBFr9z0xDcUG2UUXS93nU&index=3

Otto Scharmer of the Presencing Institute on the four levels of listening
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eLfXpRkVZaI

Songs
Hok Kolorab by Arnob celebrating diversity, harmony, a sense of community
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l2m0KysRXkc

