

Supporting System Changers

*The role of system thinking,
leadership and wellbeing*



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Summary

In this report, we outline three features of entrepreneurial support that have become – through years of testing around the world – top priorities for Ashoka’s Fellowship support program.

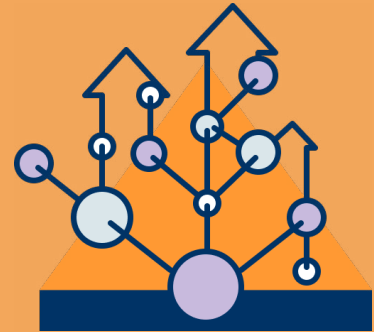
Based on our observations, we believe that these features are essential components of effective entrepreneurial support, and that they can play a crucial role in helping social entrepreneurs to create equitable, lasting change. By sharing our learnings, we hope to provide our colleagues and partners in the growing social entrepreneurship ecosystem with useful inspiration and practical insights for their work. More importantly, we hope to spark meaningful dialogue about how our sector can continue to improve and innovate together.

In short, the three features are:

- 1 Systems Change Strategy:** Highly impactful social entrepreneurs develop solutions that address systems, not symptoms. We can train our minds to think holistically, map systems, involve multiple perspectives, surface root causes, identify the most powerful levers for intervention, and make system change our north star.
- 2 Changemaking Leadership:** We can learn to reframe our mental models and strengthen our self-awareness. We can practice leadership that ignites the changemaker potential of others, builds open and fluid organizations, and unlocks collective power.
- 3 Wellbeing:** With support, patience, and humility, we can grow in authenticity and wholeness, ground ourselves in purpose and meaning, strengthen our resilience and sustainability, and make holistic wellbeing a priority in our lives. Self-awareness can be cultivated, and pain and trauma can be healed. Wellbeing journeys can reframe the way we see the world, provide us with direction and support, and create systems that hold us accountable for our goals.

Design Principles and Practical Tools

We believe that these features are the cornerstones of an effective support program for social entrepreneurs. For each feature, we have defined a handful of design principles which, in our experience, make support for them most effective. We also provide practical tips and tools for each principle, along with selected case studies.



Mindset Shift: Everyone a Changemaker

Before discussing the principles in detail, we explain the fundamental paradigms underpinning our thinking and analyze the type of change that highly impactful social entrepreneurs work towards: systems change that engages everyone as a changemaker. We also explain how this approach affects the nature of leadership.

Let's share learnings and insights!

We are excited to share the learnings, resources, and tips that we have compiled through our efforts to build meaningful learning journeys around these three features. We hope you will find them useful, and we welcome any feedback, learnings, or other insights that you would like to share.





Photo credit: Ashoka

“I’ve followed Ashoka’s great work in these areas, and this new report is a very welcome addition. It provides a clear overview of priority areas and how they are linked. As such it’s an extremely useful resource for changemakers starting their work and those who have been beavering away for decades.”

Michele Ernsting, Director of Partnerships, THINK School
of Creative Leadership,
The Netherlands

Key terms

A **social entrepreneur** is an “individual who conceives of, and relentlessly pursues, a new idea designed to solve societal problems on a very wide scale by changing the systems that undergird the problems. This definition includes two critical components. First, the entrepreneur must seek to create impact on a wide societal scale; they will not rest until the new idea has been broadly adopted the national—and even international—level. Second, at the entrepreneur must seek systemic change, defined as the fundamental reform of existing societal systems and/or the creation of new ones.”

A **changemaker** is anyone who takes action to address a problem, activates others, and works towards solutions for the good of all.

This report defines **system change** as addressing root causes rather than symptoms by altering, shifting and transforming structures, customs, mindsets, power dynamics, and rules through collaboration across a diverse set of actors with the intent of achieving lasting improvement of societal issues on a local, national, and global level.

In this report, we use supporters and intermediaries as equivalents. **Supporters of social entrepreneurs** or intermediaries for social entrepreneurship are a wide variety of actors who aim to support individual social entrepreneurs or to advance social entrepreneurship as a field of action. They come in all shapes and sizes, including incubators, accelerators, fellowships, awards, networks, investment funds, grant makers, training programs, graduate programs, university degrees, consultancies, co-working spaces, and so forth.



**“This is such a wonderful piece of work
and a big gift for all of us in the social
entrepreneurship ecosystem.”**

Berivan Elis, Founding Manager, IstasyonTEDU, Turkey

Foreword

Around the world, social entrepreneurship continues to rise. The movement is growing, without a doubt. But it's not just the scale we see accelerating.

As social entrepreneurs continue to hone their craft in response to our ever-changing reality, the field of social entrepreneurship is changing and maturing. We see new practices appearing, new insights emerging, and new research helping social entrepreneurs to maximize impact. Our reality is changing faster than ever, and so too is the art of changemaking. We have identified a series of changes in practice and mindset that are paving the way for the future of changemaking. These include:

- A cognitive shift from a mechanistic way of interpreting reality to an adaptive and holistic one. New strategies embrace, navigate, and steer complex system dynamics.
- An expansion of awareness from ego-system to eco-system: an interconnected and interdependent whole in which the collective creation of a shared purpose forms the basis for lasting change.
- An organizational shift from closed organizations to open, fluid teams that unlock collective power. Social entrepreneurs organize as networks and communities to mobilize ecosystems for change.
- A shift in leadership from a command-and-control style to leadership that unlocks the changemaking potential of everyone. Social entrepreneurs enable others to be changemakers at all levels.
- A personal shift from self-neglect and sacrifice to wellbeing and inner growth. Self-care allows for long-term resilience, while purpose fosters authenticity and self-awareness nurtures transformational change.

In accordance with these developments, our goal with this report is threefold

First, to reflect. How have we, Ashoka, reacted to these shifts? How have these changes influenced the way we support social entrepreneurs today? We have screened our global support practice to identify patterns, surface learnings, and set priorities for the future.

Second, in the interest of collective learning, we wish to share our insights with other members of the social entrepreneurship ecosystem. As our understanding evolves, we will keep sharing – and we hope to hear and learn from you as well.

Third, we hope to spark conversation and create spaces for collaboration to evolve the field of social entrepreneurship. This report is an invitation for support organizations to come together and reflect on how we can most effectively strengthen the important work of social entrepreneurs across the world.

To surface key features of effective social entrepreneurship support, we asked ourselves: what are the mindsets, behaviours and leadership skills that allow for systems changing impact? How can they be taught, co-learned, and experienced? What features should be incorporated into every social entrepreneurship support program?


Of course, beyond the three features highlighted in this report, many other areas of support remain relevant. Our Fellowship program continues to offer financial support (via a stipend), security (for lifethreatening situations), network-building opportunities (connections with peers and allies), and more. However, the key features discussed in this report have become key priorities for our program.

This report relies upon the wisdom of a myriad of partners, allies, researchers, and supporters, and the insights and learnings within are co-creations nurtured by the experience and practice of Ashoka Fellows around the world. Social entrepreneurs are our guides, and their experiences are the source of our collective wisdom.

The world is changing, and so too is the field of social entrepreneurship. Let's work together to develop learning pathways that support social entrepreneurs to create transformational change.



Photo credit: Ashoka



“This report has added a new practice guideline to understanding systems thinking from Ashoka’s perspective. For social entrepreneurs who understand Ashoka programs, this report is well-suited as a guideline and framework. For other readers, this report is another new source for wider insights about creating changes from system perspectives.”

Dessy Aliandrina, Founder and Executive Director of SociopreneurID

Ashoka

Since coining the term social entrepreneurship in 1980, Ashoka has built the world's largest network of leading social entrepreneurs.

Every year, we identify leading social entrepreneurs from across the world whose systems-changing ideas are solving problems and creating opportunities for the good of all. Through a rigorous selection process, we elect the most innovative and ethical of these changemakers into our Ashoka Fellowship, which now supports close to 4,000 social entrepreneurs in over 93 countries.

Ashoka's core belief is that everyone can and must recognize their power as a changemaker. Since we cannot create this massive societal shift alone, we partner with influential institutions, universities, cities, companies, media organizations, publishers, and other change leaders to unlock the changemaker potential of everyone and create a world in which everyone has the skills and mindset they need to flourish.



“The most significant challenge we face as teams is healthy norms of working together and valuing each other in a world where collaboration rather than competition is required to address the social, economic and political issues that confront us.”

Wamuyu Mahinda, Managing Partner Collaborative Value Partners Africa, Ashoka Fellow, Kenya

Introduction

Objectives: The why, who and what of this guide.

Social entrepreneurs are now widely recognised as a major driving force for positive social change around the world. Accordingly, the ecosystem of support for social entrepreneurs has grown tremendously over the last several decades.

This guide is written for the wide variety of actors who are working to support current and future generations of social entrepreneurs and to advance social entrepreneurship as a global field of action. Support for social entrepreneurs comes in all shapes and sizes, including incubators, accelerators, fellowships, awards, networks, investment funds, grant makers, training programs, graduate programs, university degrees, consultancies, co-working spaces, and more.

Ashoka itself has supported social entrepreneurs for 40+ years, continuously expanding and deepening its support programs to meet the needs of 4,000 Ashoka Fellows in 93 countries. Over the years, we have learned from the inspiring and insightful leadership of our Fellows. As we learn, we continue to innovate and to share our experiences with other supporters around the world. With this guide, **'Supporting System Changers'**, we aim to continue sharing our learnings by focusing on three features that have emerged as essential to our social entrepreneurship support program: **systems change strategy, changemaking leadership, and wellbeing.**

We believe that any support program for social entrepreneurs should offer learnings on how to develop and implement an effective strategy for changing systems, enable social entrepreneurs to build leadership capacity that ignites the changemaking potential in others, and promote wellbeing as an essential force for realizing positive change in the world.

We have learned from our Fellows that social entrepreneurs who fully embrace and embody these three features can significantly accelerate and expand their impact. Conversely, social entrepreneurs who ignore these features are more likely to find themselves stuck, frustrated, and burnt out, with their impact stifled.



While this guide primarily draws on our experiences working with and learning from our diverse global network of Ashoka Fellows, we also rely on the brilliant work of many other supporters, researchers, and practitioners. Many of these inspiring partners are featured in examples and case studies throughout the guide, and we recommend checking out their great publications as well.

We hope that by sharing our approach to these three features of entrepreneurial support, explaining our key design principles, and offering selected tools and resources, other supporters will find useful inspiration and insights for their work. Moving towards a just and sustainable world is a challenge we can only master together, and learning from each other is a crucial aspect of our shared social entrepreneurship movement.



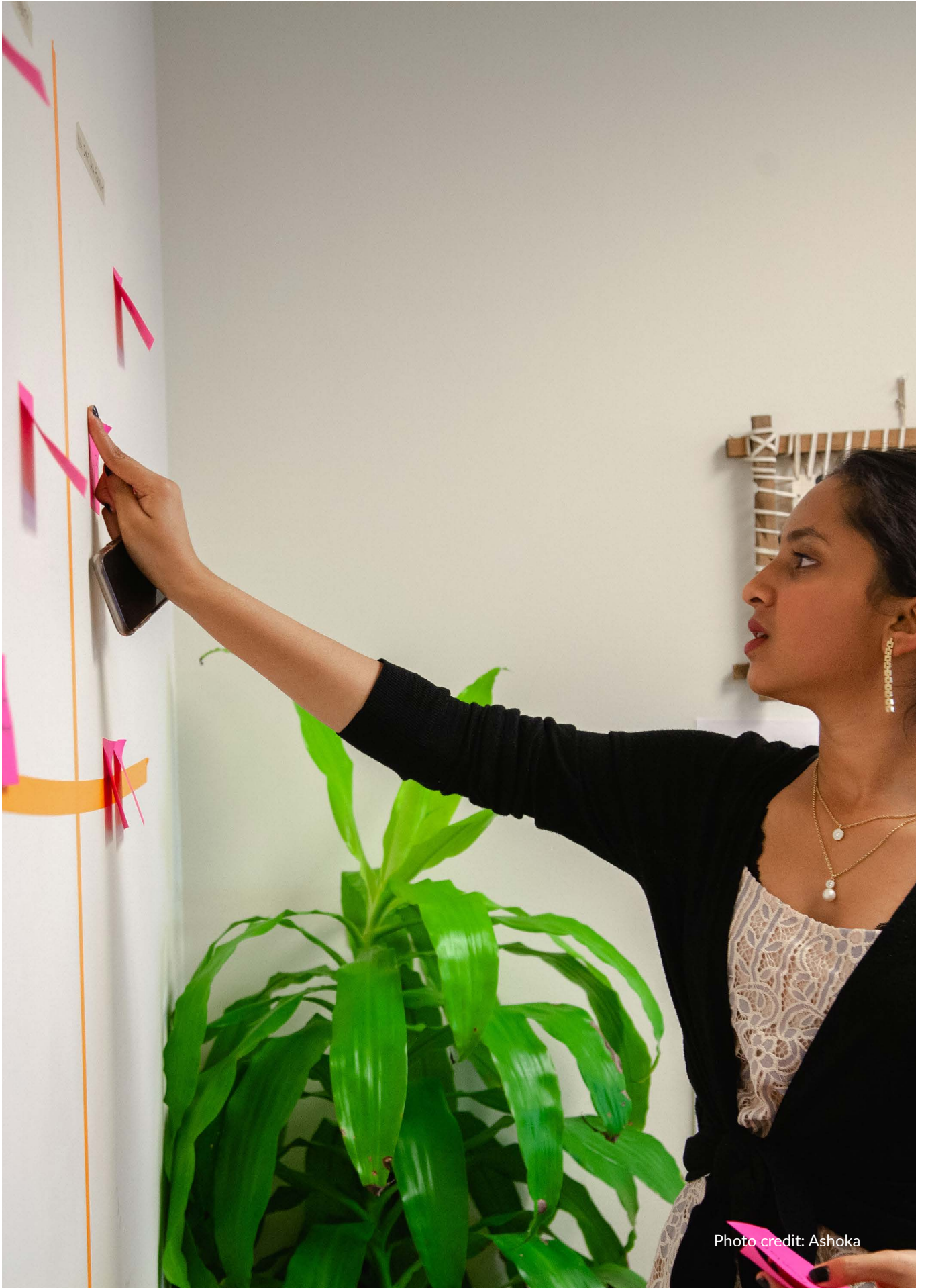


Photo credit: Ashoka

“Moving towards a just and sustainable world is a challenge we can only master together and learning from each other is a crucial aspect of our shared social entrepreneurship movement.”

Okezie Kelechukwu, Executive Director and Founder of Neighborhood Environment Watch (NEW) Foundation,
Ashoka Fellow, Nigeria



Application: a guide to using this guide

Thematic Relevance

The design principles recommended in this guide can be integrated into any type of support provided to social entrepreneurs and changemakers. These principles are crucial to any discussion on strategy, leadership, and wellbeing and are relevant to many of the challenges that social entrepreneurs face, including scaling social impact; personal growth; team, organisational, and collaborative leadership development; resilience, productivity, purpose, and more.

Depending on the type of support you provide, one, two, or all three of the key features and respective sections of the guide may be relevant to you. We recommend using the principles described in each section as a checklist to evaluate your support program and identify opportunities for improvement. Let us take leadership principle #3 as an example: “Systemic leadership ignites the changemaking power in others.” We suggest that you begin by reading the definition in the explanatory text below and reflecting on the degree to which this principle is expressed in your support offerings and thus learned and experienced by the social entrepreneurs in your network. If necessary, refer to the tips, tools, and case studies for resources, examples, and inspiration on how to implement the principle.

Situational Flexibility

The format of your support, whether online or offline, individually or in large groups, through short workshops or entire courses, or anywhere in between - is in this case secondary. The design principles in this report are applicable across different formats and can be implemented in a variety of ways. The implementation tips and tools included with each principle are simply suggestions, as there are many effective ways to bring each principle to life. Moreover, the principles are applicable for social entrepreneurs with a wide range of experience. While they have been derived from our experience working with experienced social entrepreneurs, we believe they are best cultivated from an early stage.

We have formulated these principles from our global perspective, and we believe that they are broadly applicable across different geographies. However, this may not hold true for all cultural contexts. If you have doubts about the cultural relevancy of a particular principle or practice, we encourage you to review the principles with experienced social entrepreneurs and practitioners. Similarly, the choice of words and phrases used in this guide may be interpreted differently depending on the context of the reader. If you have any feedback on how this guide applies to your cultural context, please reach out to us.

Importance & Interdependence

As mentioned previously, our experience shows that systems change strategy, changemaking leadership, and wellbeing are essential competencies of effective social entrepreneurs. These three features are highly connected and interdependent and should be treated as such. In our strategy work with Ashoka Fellows, for example, we make sure to introduce fundamental elements of leadership and wellbeing as well. Without changemaking leadership and holistic wellbeing, even the most sophisticated systems change strategies can lose effectiveness and create unintended consequences. Unfortunately, we often find that wellbeing is the most neglected feature of the three. For this reason, we have added a section specifically explaining the importance of wellbeing and our rationale for including it as a key feature.






Embodied & Embedded

We have found that support is most effective when the principles are embodied by the supporters themselves and embedded into every aspect of the learning experience, including the program design, physical space, teaching methods, and communication. For example, support programs should include authentic safe spaces, appropriate breaks, and other relevant practices that embed wellbeing into the learning experience. When the principles are embodied and embedded, the learning experience becomes more authentic, immersive, and experiential. While this approach is particularly effective, it can also be more challenging to implement, as it requires in-depth experience, practice, and additional effort, attention, and resources. In these cases, we recommend working with experienced practitioners. At Ashoka, we constantly work with partners – including social entrepreneurs themselves – to co-create and co-deliver our support programs.

Lastly, we believe that these principles are equally applicable to the strategies, leadership styles, and wellbeing practices of supporters themselves. Authentic leadership is an inside out process; only by practicing and embodying it is it possible to transfer its value and impact to your participants, your strategy, and your other stakeholders. As the famous proverb of Mahatma Gandhi says: be the change you wish to see in the world. Or perhaps, be the systems change you wish to see in the world.

For this reason, this guide intentionally uses ‘we us our’ pronouns when describing the principles and corresponding examples. These should be read as inclusive pronouns referring not only to the social entrepreneurs but also to the supporters themselves.



Continuous Learning

The principles in this report describe our current understanding of how to best support social entrepreneurs. While we are constantly striving to learn and improve, we recognize that we do not fully embody all of them all of the time. Hence, we view the principles as aspirational and invite you to do the same.

Moreover, our constantly evolving understanding of what constitutes effective support will certainly look different in five years. Our approach is guided by the core belief that entrepreneurial support programs must derive from the lived experience of social entrepreneurs. We work closely with our Fellows and community members to transform their challenges into meaningful learning and support programs. As social entrepreneurs continue to adapt to our changing world, so too will our support and our understanding of what makes it most impactful.

We very much welcome any feedback, ideas, insights, or collaboration that help us and other supporters to continue our shared learning journey. Please reach out using the contact details included at the end of this report.





Photo credit: Ashoka

“Systems leadership is of ever-increasing importance and this report does an excellent job at explaining it and helping you become a systems leader.”

Mark Vernooij, Partner, THINK School of Creative Leadership, The Netherlands



Framing: the perspectives and paradigms informing this guide

More than forty years of work with leading social entrepreneurs has sharpened our understanding of what it takes to achieve lasting, systemic change. The insights we have amassed from our Fellows manifest in our current vision: Everyone a Changemaker. Our beliefs and value systems influence this guide by defining the type of change we seek to create.

Our understanding of what constitutes and creates lasting systems change can be summarised by four core insights:

- A. Systems change requires everyone to participate in and contribute to the system and its desired outcomes (i.e. it requires everyone to be a changemaker).
- B. Systems change requires leaders who engage others as (co-)leaders and changemakers.
- C. Systems change requires re-framing perceptions and shifting mindsets. It requires a collaborative approach to problem solving and the recognition that every person has a role to play.
- D. Systems change requires leaders to bring their whole selves into an all-encompassing, transformational journey.



A: Systems Change requires Everyone to be a Changemaker.

The problems we see in the world are mostly the products of broken systems. Some of these systems have been wholly created by humans (such as the educational or economic systems), while others are shaped by our actions (such as ecological and food systems we are inherently part of). Systems are not always well-defined; in fact, sometimes it is the lack of a system that creates issues.

To fundamentally address problems, we must examine the systems from which they emanate. This requires scrutinizing both the visible elements of a system, such as laws, customs, and common practices, and the more invisible ones, such as relationships, power dynamics, and mindsets. Albert Einstein's famous words - "we cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them" - remind us of the importance of looking into the worldviews and mindsets used to identify and define a system.

Systemic perspectives have always been important, but today they are more relevant than ever. The degree of connection, interdependence, and complexity in our world is rapidly increasing, and the rate of change is growing exponentially. In this change-based order, many systems are showing vulnerabilities - especially in the context of "wicked" problems such as climate change, migration, corruption, and the global pandemic. Consequently, the key to solving most of our problems lies in shaping and building resilient systems. We need systems that are designed for rapid evolution and adaptation. The easier, fairer, and faster a system can change, the more resilient it becomes. When more people participate and contribute to the evolution of a system, it produces better outcomes over time. It is this insight that drives our vision and mission at Ashoka. We have learned from decades of observing the system-changing work of our

Fellows that in order to achieve resilient, flourishing, and just systems, everyone must identify as a changemaker. When everyone connects with their power and ability to contribute to solutions for social progress, change becomes more sustainable, culturally relevant, and equitable. Like antibodies in our immune system, the more changemakers there are in a given system, the healthier it is.





“When looking at the network of Ashoka Fellows in aggregate, Ashoka sees that what matters most in how well and how far impact is achieved is not the size of one’s budget, nor the number of those directly served. Rather it is the idea spread: how many people are collectively engaged in achieving that impact through independent replication of the ideas, insights, and how-tos. Success in terms of impact also hinges on how well these social entrepreneurs attract and build teams with other entrepreneurial or intrapreneurial leaders across sectors. In other words, the most effective social entrepreneurs are those whose models help everyone be problem-solvers. This is the insight which has led to Everyone a Changemaker and enabled Ashoka to develop a road map to getting there.”

Diana Wells, President Emerita, Ashoka

B. Systems Change requires leaders who engage everyone to become changemakers.

To affect the kind of change described above, the nature of social change work must evolve. Traditional ways of leading are no longer adequate when faced with accelerating rates of change, interconnection, and complexity.

Leaders must seek to embrace and, where possible, to understand the connected, complex, dynamic, and emergent properties of systems. This understanding can only be developed together with others, since our perspective of a system is only one among many. Most importantly, leaders must enable everyone within a system to recognize and utilize their power to create positive change. This approach to social change addresses many of the current criticisms of philanthro-capitalism. Engaging others to be changemakers is a powerful principle for creating legitimacy, equity and accountability for systems change work.

We know there are limits to understanding systems and to measuring our attribution to changing them, so we contribute with humility, curiosity, inclusivity, and persistence. We are invited to commit long-term, to stay flexible, and to adapt along the way as we discover, learn, and act. In a landscape characterized by uncertainty, we seek to build trust, strengthen relationships, and accept risk as a prerequisite for growth and progress. We recognise that our solutions are only some among many, and that simply scaling our own ideas will not be sufficient. Unlocking just and sustainable change in our systems requires collaborating with many different stakeholders, strengthening and building on their solutions, and inviting everyone to be part of the change process.




“86% of Fellows report that Ashoka helped them see their work at a systems change level. 92% of these confirm they have made changes to their strategy as a result.”

The Unlonely Planet - Global Fellow Survey, 2018

C. Systems change requires re-framing perceptions and shifting mindsets.

Behaviours and structures are, at their root, shaped by mindsets, worldviews, and belief systems. To achieve lasting systems change, our impact strategies must include change at this underlying level. Powerful mindset shifts enable truly sustainable and inclusive change. While policy change is often enacted by a few powerful players, a mindset shift or new emerging social norm can produce change that is collectively owned and shaped by the social groups most affected by it. In fact, explicit systems changes are often rejected, reversed, or rendered ineffective when they are not supported by a complementary mindset shift. For example, laws on gender equality can only be effective in so far as they produce or are complemented by a change in mindset and attitude. In many countries, we have seen such laws scarcely enforced or overturned because of insufficient support from the wider population. For this reason, explicit system changes, although visible and important, are not enough to achieve just, long-term change.





“I think as an organization we have made that kind of organic evolution from project-based work into system change. But with Ashoka, I think, it became a strategy.”

Ashoka Fellow, Germany



D. Systems Change requires leaders to put their whole self into transformation.

Systemic work invites us to look at ourselves and the world through a new and always evolving lens. We are always developing new perspectives on:

- Our view of ourselves: we expand a rational and fixed perspective to include the recognition of a constantly evolving living organism.
- Our view of others: we see and come to value our differences and recognize our similarities and interdependences.
- Our view of society: we evolve our understanding of social norms and structures from being objectively given to being socially constructed.
- Our view of the world: we understand diverse and even paradoxical world views, including both a mechanistic paradigm and an organic one.
- Our view of our lives: we acknowledge the importance of material goods in satisfying our basic human needs, while also recognizing the importance of connecting with purpose, meaning, and cultural evolution.
- Our view of what is valuable: we redefine what is valuable, transcending the narrow focus on material acquisition and professional achievement to include individual, social, and planetary wellbeing.
- Our view of relationships: we recognize the importance of strengthening relationships and deepening our interactions with others. We do not limit ourselves to transactional exchanges with a single bottom line.
- Our view of changemaking: we recognize that everyone is powerful, and that together, we create common good. We realize that siloed leaders and hierarchical structures are rarely effective in current times, and that new forms of organising and leading are needed.



“The greatest breakthroughs of the 21st century will not occur because of technology; they will occur because of an expanding concept of what it means to be human.”

John Naisbitt, Futurist

Examples: Selected research and key patterns observed.

- “The 5 Trademarks of Agile Organizations” stresses the importance of moving away from the mindset of ‘organisations as machines’ towards a view of organisations as living systems.
- In *Reinventing Organizations*, Frederic Laloux identifies specific examples of next stage living organisations that operate according to the principles of self-management, authenticity, wholeness, and evolutionary purpose.
- MIT professors Otto Scharmer and Peter Senge emphasize a shift from ego-driven change to self and ecosystem-driven change characterized by emergent possibilities.
- The Collective Leadership Institute has conducted extensive applied research to uncover the capacities and processes needed to shift from leadership as an individual capacity to leadership as a practice of the collective.
- CoCreative has identified nine areas where culturally dominant ways of knowing, being, and doing most impair effective systems change work, such as embracing either-or thinking to the neglect of both-and thinking, working from a present-future orientation to the neglect of a past-present orientation, and relying on standardizing, counting, and measuring to the neglect of imagery, feeling, and spiritual experience.
- Looking through the lens of practice: Ashoka and McKinsey surveyed 109 Fellows and senior members of the Ashoka community. Twelve were interviewed in depth, resulting in the following key insights:
 - Leading in times of rapid change is difficult but possible.
 - We need leaders with bold mindsets and new skills to lead this kind of systems change, not just in the social sector, but also in the corporate world. Value creation needs to be redefined to create new markets and build a pathway to the economies of the future.
 - System changers shared a common world view: Every problem is solvable, and everyone (individuals and organizations) can contribute to society.

Now that we have defined the type of change we are aiming for, we move to the core sections of the guide, which examine how supporters of social entrepreneurs can integrate systems change strategy, changemaking leadership, and holistic wellbeing into their offerings.

As mentioned in the introduction, our experience demonstrates that all three features are essential for social entrepreneurs to significantly accelerate their impact. Although each feature is presented in a separate section, they are intricately linked and interdependent. With this in mind, we will begin by unpacking the strategy element of achieving systems change.

“Funders often like to support programs that address all aspects of a social problem holistically. Systems change requires a complete rethink of this approach. It challenges funders and supporters to instead look at the system as a whole and back those entrepreneurs and solutions that can make the most impactful change or achieve the greatest leverage effect despite limited resources.”

Patrick Hoffmann, Program Manager, The Human Safety Net, Generali’s global foundation

“Today we are witnessing persistent patterns of failure in responding to many social challenges. This is why we need to question and review the systems we created to solve them. This guide is a practical resource for social entrepreneurs to explore more effective ways to change systems that are unfit for purpose.”

Miquel de Paladella, CEO and co-founder, UpSocial, Spain



System Change Strategy

How do we design strategies to achieve systems change?



“David Orr, professor of Environmental Studies at Oberlin College, likes to tell the story of the entrance exam for the insane asylum. Candidates are led into a cement-lined room with a row of faucets on one wall, fully open, gushing water. Leaning against the opposite wall are dozens of buckets and mops. The insane run frantically for the buckets and mops. The sane turn off the faucets. If that’s the test, we live in a land that’s certifiably crazy. Name a problem. With astounding consistency, we go for the mop-and-bucket solution.”

Donella Meadows,
“Mop-and-Bucket Solutions Keep Us Forever Cleaning Up”, 1995



Principle 1: Think holistically, not mechanistically

Systems thinking helps us to understand the forces that keep a social problem in place despite our efforts to alleviate the symptoms for as many people as possible. It creates an awareness of the complex roles and relationships within the system, of policies and incentives, and of resource flows and feedback loops. In this way, it acts as an antidote to mop-and-bucket solutions.

Take deforestation as an example. One mop-and-bucket solution is simply to plant new trees. This solution does not address any of the reasons that trees are being cut down in the first place, which means that the problem will likely reoccur. That is why Ashoka Fellow Nicolas Métro, a participant of the Ashoka Globalizer Program, is taking a systems-level approach. Métro realized that because there are no value chains for living trees, local communities are incentivized to sell the timber and use the land for other purposes. Based on this insight, he began identifying dysfunctional and emerging value chains in the hopes of fixing them or accelerating their development. For example, in Togo, communities were using the leafs of *Moringa* trees to create a food supplement that is very effective at reducing child malnutrition. This was not enough to save these trees, though, because the quality of the supplement was too varied to sell in large quantities. Métro developed a strategy to introduce a quality standard, including technical specifications, a certification scheme, and a quality control mechanism. With the quality standard in place, this value chain is a sustainable alternative to deforestation.

Value-chains are only one type of system that social entrepreneurs can change. Systems thinking can also be applied to the criminal justice system, the education system, family dynamics, and nearly any other area of society. The point of this example is that systems thinking often leads to new ideas that a mop-and-bucket perspective would find counter-intuitive. Why would a quality standard for oil save forests in Togo? It also demonstrates that a single intervention is rarely enough to solve a complex problem. In order to effectively address deforestation, Métro needs to build a coalition of local businesses, industry representatives, and policy makers who understand the many factors contributing to the problem.

There is a risk that participants will follow the same mechanistic approach to social change that underlies mop-and-bucket solutions: “in this system, element A causes problem B; therefore, we need to change A.” This risk can be mitigated by experienced mentors and facilitators. If you hear the following quotes from participants, chances are high that the support program managed to promote holistic thinking:

- “When we started, we didn’t realize that our issue A is actually related to C and D.”
- “We realized that if we just change A, we will not just achieve B; we will also create a number of unintended consequences.”

Tips for Supporters:

- Ask participants open-ended questions such as, “what else could be relevant here?”, “what other consequences could this intervention have?”, and “how would the situation change if this hypothesis turns out to be wrong?”
- Use games to help participants recognize how complex the issues that they are dealing with are. “The Systems Thinking Playbook” by Sweeney and Meadows provides ideas to get started.

Resources

- Book: *Thinking in Systems* by Donella Meadows
- Book: *Systems Thinking for Social Change* by David Peter Stroh
- Article: [“Beyond Organizational Scale: How Social Entrepreneurs Create Systems Change”](#) by Skoll/Schwab
- Toolkit: [Social Impact Educator Toolkit](#) by Map the System



“Systems thinking is a way of knowing that is not taught in our education system, where the focus is on breaking things down and looking at the parts individually. This is a big barrier for achieving impact on a systems level.”

Laura Winn, Head of School of Systems Change



Principle 2: Map systems to the extent that it's useful for your work

Systems thinking is often associated with complicated-looking maps full of boxes and arrows. If participants have a background in System Dynamics or computer modelling, or if they simply enjoy the analytical rigor that these exercises require, detailed maps can be a powerful tool to promote a better understanding of the system and generate new insights. However, in-depth systems mapping is not a requirement for an effective impact strategy. Ashoka Globalizer uses only three simple exercises in its advisory

process. Many of the finalists in the Map the System competition (discussed below) identify the key dynamic of a system with very simple maps, and some present their findings without any maps at all.

Intermediaries supporting social entrepreneurs should be clear about the role that system mapping plays in their program and choose tools accordingly. For example, at Ashoka Globalizer, system mapping is used to identify the most attractive systems change goals from a list of potential objectives. Participants are often experts with decades of experience in their fields. The program helps participants highlight an important dynamic in a system that they want to change, rather than trying to deepen their understanding of the issue in question. For this purpose, simple frameworks like 5R or Waters of Systems Change (see references below) are sufficient. On the other hand, if a program wants to help a cross-sector alliance come to a shared understanding about systemic issues, a longer and more thorough set of exercises (such as the one presented in the course “Systems Practice” by Acumen and the Omidyar Group) may be required.

No matter how systems are mapped, participants should be clear about which systems and subsystems they want to influence. For example, in the U.S., the education system, healthcare system, labour market, and criminal justice system all influence the number of people in prison. Within the criminal justice system, a team could look at various sub-systems, like policing, bail, prisons, and court proceedings.

Participants should know which of these sub-systems they are targeting, which elements of these sub-systems they want to change, and what that change should look like. Although these ideas will evolve as participants learn and experiment, they provide an important sense of direction and a helpful starting point.



Tips for Supporters:

- Provide your participants access to mentors with expertise in systems thinking.
- Be comfortable with a range of systems thinking tools, from easy-to-use frameworks for a quick one-hour discussion to rigorous methodologies for more in-depth analyses.
- Test and refine your system map or analysis so it captures the complexity needed but isn't so complex that it inhibits clear understanding.
- Make the benefits of systems thinking available without requiring participants to learn about the technicalities. Good facilitators can discuss systemic issues using the language of participants.

Resources:

- Article: [“Leverage Points: Places to Intervene in a System”](#) by Donella Meadows
- Article: [“The Water of Systems Change”](#) by FSG
- Article: [“The 5 Rs Framework in the Program Cycle”](#) by USAID
- Article: [“Systems Change – Big or Small?”](#) by Odin Mühlenbein
- Module: www.changemaking.net by Odin Mühlenbein and Reem Rahman
- Module: [Systems Practice](#) by Odin Mühlenbein and Reem Rahman
- Systems Modelling Tool: [Kumu](#)
- Systems Modelling Tool: [InsightMaker](#)



*“Systemic impact requires
power mapping and time to
study the ecosystem.”*

Joseph Nkandu, Ashoka Fellow, Founder and CEO of
NUCAFE, participant of the Ashoka Globalizer Program

Principle 3: Include multiple perspectives

Participants must recognize that their perspective is only one among many, and that in order to be successful, they must learn from and incorporate the perspectives of others. This is a fundamental tenet of systems thinking and should be promoted as part of a systems thinking mindset.

In practical terms, it is important for participants to include diverse perspectives when they analyse systems and develop strategies. Participants should consider consulting other civil-society organizations, competitors, academics, and, most importantly, the people directly affected by a given social issue. As in the previous principle, intermediaries supporting social entrepreneurs should be clear about the goal of these consultations. At Ashoka Globalizer, our goal is to make sure that the systems change goal that a participant has identified resonates with potential partners and other experts. In Oxford's Map the System competition (see Example 2 further below), teams start with only a limited understanding of the system that they want to analyse and conduct up to 100 interviews over the course of several months before summarizing their findings.

It's also important to ensure that the voices of stakeholder groups inform participants' analysis, if not the strategy itself. Stakeholders are any actors in the system who impact or are impacted by the change we seek—for example, community members or policymakers.

Tips for Supporters:

- Help participants understand the need to build trust among vulnerable stakeholders in the system and to find out what they need to be able to contribute their experiences, perspectives, and ideas to the work.
- Use games and case studies of failed initiatives to help participants recognize that their perspective on a system or social issue is limited.
- Invite alumni of your program to talk about the insights that they have gained by including additional perspectives.
- If your program has a topical focus, create a pool of people with relevant experiences that participants can use to broaden their understanding.

Resources:

- Tool: [Impact Gaps Canvas](#) by Daniela Papi-Thornton
- Tool: [Sensing Journeys](#) by The Presencing Institute

“Ashoka’s recognition has given more dignity to our role and more awareness of the possibility that we could truly generate change. So, while initially the vision was to change the lives of people in detention, we then realized that we could generate systemic change, and at that point we made a qualitative leap in the vision. We understood that we could really influence change, and this certainly has been given to us by Ashoka.”

Ashoka Fellow, Italy

Principle 4: Unleash dormant energy

Impact strategies are often approached with a traditional business mindset. These strategies focus on growing the venture, accumulating resources, and becoming powerful enough to make change happen. We call this the Brute Force approach. In many cases, a better way to achieve system change is to unlock resources in a system that currently lie dormant. This can include money, talent, goodwill, information, and power. To unlock these resources, social entrepreneurs can inspire others to act, align actors behind a cause, help others to be more effective, and/or give people new roles in a system. We call this the Jiu Jitsu approach, and we have found that it is a much more effective strategy for catalysing change. Intermediaries should help social entrepreneurs to move from a Brute Force approach to a Jiu Jitsu approach. The following quotes are good reasons to believe that a support program for social entrepreneurs has successfully moved participants towards a Jiu Jitsu approach:

- “We thought that we needed to train this group of people, when in fact with a small tweak the existing system could do that much better.”
- “Instead of promoting this particular policy change, we now make it easier for communities to organize and speak for themselves.”



Tips for Supporters:

- Challenge social entrepreneurs to leverage and link existing resources to the cause that they care about. Good questions include: “who is in the best position to do this?”, “who else has an interest in this?”, “is what you need available somewhere, and could you somehow use it for your purposes?”
- Challenge social entrepreneurs to identify the levers for impact that require the least effort from them. Good questions include: “who are the most important actors that shape the system you aim to change”; “rank those actors according to operational efforts needed to influence them, scale of impact and probability of success”; “if you had one attempt, which strings would you pull”?

Resources:

- Article: [“Systemic and Empowering”](#) by Alexandra Ioan, Odin Mühlenbein, and Olga Shirobokova
- Module: [Systems Change Crash Course](#) by Odin Mühlenbein and Reem Rahman



“Our Design Grants cover up to \$500,000 and support for partners to refine their strategy for systems change.”

Silvia Bastante de Unverhau, Chief Philanthropy Officer
at Co-Impact

Indicators

If you want to support social entrepreneurs to unleash their full impact potential, or if you want to identify programs that properly support social entrepreneurs in systems thinking, we suggest asking the following questions:

- Do the program facilitators have expertise in systems thinking?
- Does the program introduce the concept of systems change?
- Do participants analyse the systems that they want to change?
- Do participants develop a clear statement of their intended systems change?
- Are participants encouraged to include diverse stakeholders in their strategy development process?



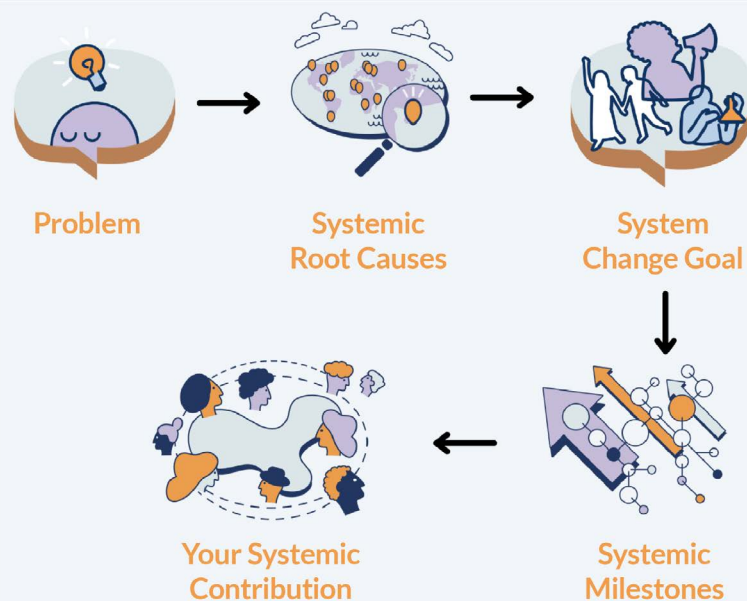


Example 1: Ashoka Globalizer

- 14-week virtual strategy process followed by a 3-day conference
- <http://ashokaglobalizer.org>
- Founded in 2010
- 27 cohorts / ~400 participants (as of September 2020)

Ashoka Globalizer is a strategy accelerator program that focuses on systems change. The program is run in cohorts, which consist of 10-15 experienced social entrepreneurs from around the world who are working in a specific topic area, like “Healthcare in Africa” or “Education and Technology.” Globalizer provides each social entrepreneur with a team of thought partners, including at least one member of the Ashoka team, one senior manager or entrepreneur from the Ashoka network, and one management consultant (usually from McKinsey). Advisory teams are distributed across the world.

Over the course of 14 weeks, each team goes through a structured, 5-step process: problem analysis, systemic root cause analysis, prioritization of a targeted systems change goal, creation of a “Systems Change Story”, and design of concrete initiatives and replication techniques. For each step, Globalizer provides tools, exercises, and experienced facilitators. Social entrepreneurs and their thought partners are expected to spend 5 hours and 2 hours per week on exercises, respectively.



After the advisory process, the participants convene at a 3-day conference to share their ideas, get feedback from peers and senior decision-makers in their field, and network with potential partners.



“Once you pass the Globalizer process, you start to figure out how your impact can change, not just to increase or scale the number of beneficiaries, but rather systemic changes.”

Gaby Arenas, Ashoka Fellow

“The Ashoka Globalizer program with systems change approach is so relevant to my work. At first, I focused only on a grass roots level but by joining the Globalizer, the organization and I were forced to think bigger in the next several years and how PeaceGeneration can play roles in the system.”

Irfan Amalee, Ashoka Fellow



“The experience was rewarding and enlightening (I learned MUCH about systems change and healthcare in Latin America).”

Steven Harutunian, pro bono advisor at Ashoka Globalizer and Senior Manager Strategy at Philips

Example 2: Map the System



Map the System

- Global, multi-stage student competition culminating in 3 days of final presentations and workshops at the University of Oxford
- <https://mapthesystem.web.ox.ac.uk/>
- Founded in 2015
- >1,100 teams in 2019 (>2,500 total) in partnership with over 34 universities and educational partners globally

Map the System is a global competition hosted by Oxford's Skoll Centre for Social Entrepreneurship that aims to foster systems thinking among budding changemakers.

Unlike traditional business plan competitions, which ask participants to pitch solutions to a specific problem, Map the System invites participants to pitch their understanding of the broader system in which a specific problem exists. Participants are not asked to provide a solution, but instead to highlight a deep understanding of the current state of their challenge and its root causes.

Educators from partner institutions organise localised editions of Map the System on their campus and can incorporate the competition into their for-credit curriculum or run it as an extracurricular programme.

The competition is loosely based on Daniela Papi-Thornton's Impact Gaps Canvas, a tool used to facilitate the understanding of a problem by mapping the challenge and solutions landscape and identifying "gaps" and possible paths to impact. The tool aims to prevent duplication and help entrepreneurs learn from the successes and failures of existing initiatives.





“Our world needs people who “think in systems”, perhaps now more than ever, to work together to address the challenges of our time. Map the System is less a competition than a platform to support the development of systems thinking and connect emerging systems leaders.”

Jill Andres, Map the System Global Final 2020 Judge

“One of the institutional learning outcomes of our college is a systems thinking mindset – yet I feel this approach is underutilized in the classroom and in teaching. Map the System provided an engaging and well-organized structure, and resources, and a fun way to bring this incredibly valuable approach into my teaching on global development.”

MTS 2020 Educator

“In this new context for leadership, strategic communication will help to organize an ongoing conversation which ultimately will lead everyone as an active player into a collaborative journey of mindset transformation. This is the path to turn everyone into a changemaker. Leadership in the age of social networks is above all someone who understands the conversational nature of human society and the communicative nature of organizations.”

Ricardo Neves, Ashoka Fellow, Brazil, author of the book “Sensemaking: Leadership for Purpose – Strategic Communication for a World of Exponential Complexity”

Changemaking Leadership

How do I inspire myself, members of my team, and others in the ecosystem to step into their power and contribute to systems change?

Over forty years of work with leading social entrepreneurs has shaped Ashoka's perspective about approaches to leadership, organization, and collaboration that positively advance systems change and ignite the changemaking capacity in everyone. Through our experience learning and working with Ashoka Fellows, scholars, and practitioners from a variety of fields, we have distilled, analysed, compiled, and synthesized patterns, lessons, frameworks, and resources about new ways of leading. What we are calling "Changemaking Leadership" is leadership that aims to galvanize others to step into their power and contribute to change for the greater good.

Recognizing that changemaking leadership is a core ingredient for social entrepreneurs to maximize their impact and create systems change, we aim to share our approach to leadership with other supporters of the global social entrepreneurship movement and thereby spark discussions and deeper exchange on the subject. Below we highlight general perspectives that impact the way we understand and approach leadership development. After defining three different levels of leadership, we unpack the four core principles of changemaking leadership and discuss their relevancy to each level. For each principle, we also include tips and resources that may be helpful for social entrepreneurs and their supporters.

Guiding Perspectives on Leadership and Leadership Development

Leadership is no longer a 'one-size-fits all' model.

Leadership is an adaptive process that requires discernment and choice.

There is no single model of leadership that fits the entire field of social entrepreneurship. Rather than choosing one leadership model to focus on, supporters should help social entrepreneurs develop a range of useful roles, competencies, and skills by exposing them to a variety of different models. Leadership often requires the ability to shift between being a leader, an enabler, a supporter, and even a follower. It means knowing when to lead and when to facilitate, when to speak and when to let others speak, when to drive change and when to co-lead with others. These different roles require different capacities, mindsets and skills.

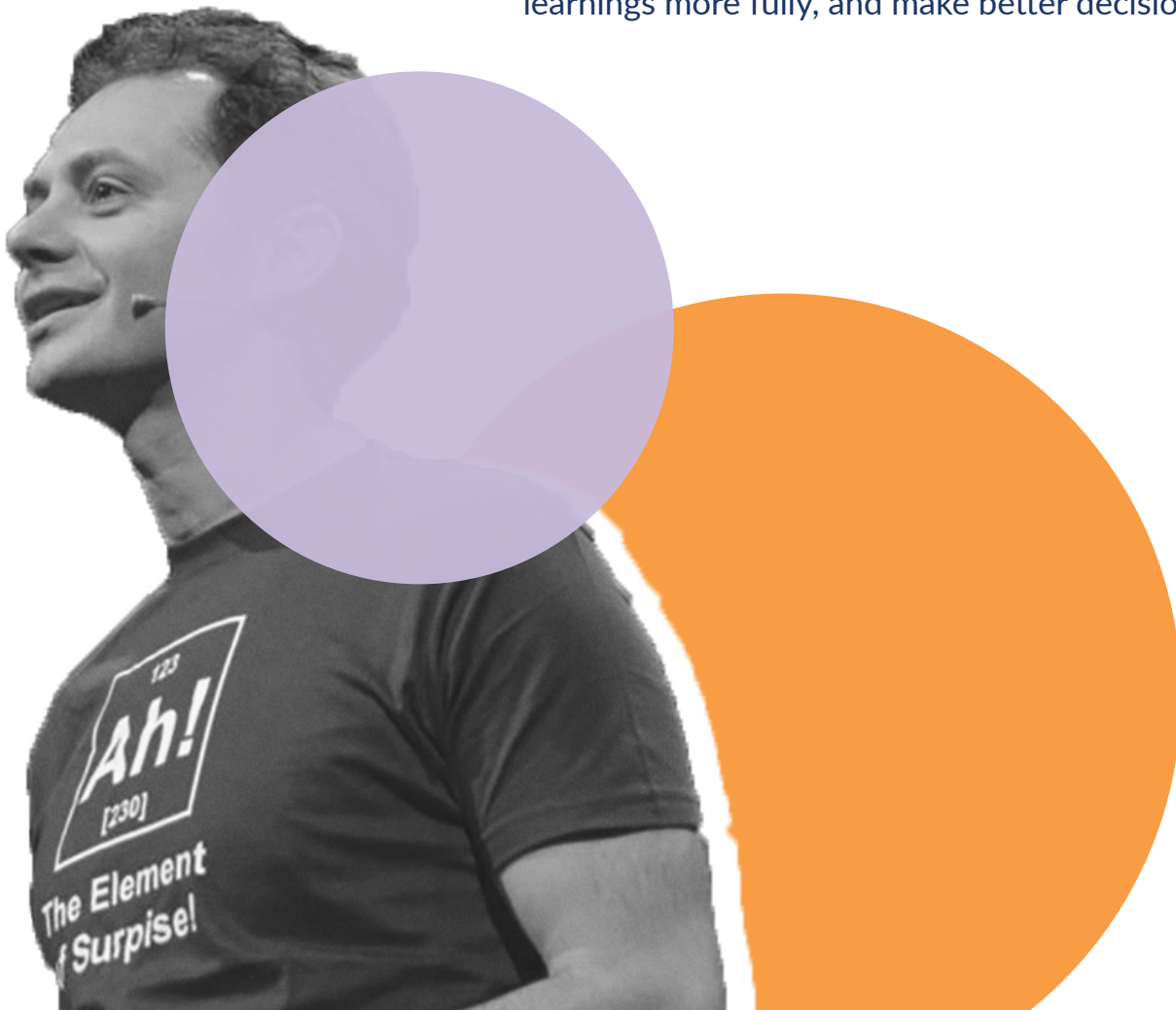
For this reason, it is crucial to build the capacity of leaders to listen and to be fully attentive to their present context so that they can determine what kind of leadership role or approach is most appropriate. In order to do so, leaders must be able to listen deeply, recognize what is happening around them, and exercise empathy.



Leadership involves a constant, subjective, and holistic learning process

Once social entrepreneurs know what is necessary for their leadership and learning, the role of supporters involves helping them to build deliberate, dedicated learning journeys– journeys that allow them to develop new practices, tools, and (peer-)support systems for managing and correcting their own development and evolution.

When designing learning journeys, it is important to make use of all forms of intelligence available to human beings - our head, heart, hands, and the connection with all that is larger than ourselves. These are all important methods of receiving information and are all part of the way individuals learn as whole humans. By using all our senses and all forms of intelligence, we can uncover new insights, discover different perspectives, understand and integrate learnings more fully, and make better decisions.



Leadership can be expressed at various levels: individual, team, and ecosystem

- **Individual:** Leaders are at the heart of change. While it is true that systems can shape people, people also shape systems. Intermediaries need to consider and unpack the ways in which our inner state influences our outer actions.
- **Teams:** Leadership is the result of collective practice. Transformative change happens in teams. Connecting your team with passion and purpose, enabling shared leadership, and building organizations with permeable borders are all ways to unleash the changemaker potential in teams and organizations. Over the past several years, we have observed that in a change-based world, teams do not belong exclusively to one organization. Throughout society, we are seeing the emergence of open and fluid teams comprised of individuals from different sectors and organizations who align around a shared vision.
- **Ecosystem:** Only through the collective power and engagement of everyone in the ecosystem can we create transformational social impact. Weaving together everyone in the ecosystem around a shared purpose and vision, building networks and organizational structures that catalyze collective action, and enabling social movements whose impact accelerates exponentially are all ways to drive eco-systemic change.



Core Principles of Support for Changemaking Leadership

Principle 1: Support leaders to see they are part of the system they want to change – and to strengthen awareness of their mental models and worldviews

Our conscious and unconscious beliefs, values, behaviours, biases, judgments, and assumptions are reflected in the systems we create. An individual's ability to develop a deep awareness about how they embody the values they want to see in the world, how they live and act in interconnected and interdependent environments, and how they can re-discover reality through the eyes of the other is essential for their capacity to galvanize others into their own power and ignite conscious, equitable and just systems change.

We recommend creating space for social entrepreneurs to develop awareness about their mindsets, perceptions, and world views, as these are what shape their values, beliefs, and behaviours in the context of leadership and collaboration. It is essential for leaders to become aware of their limiting and expansive beliefs, mindsets, and world views because these perceptions impact the way they behave in the world.

For example, consider the differing ways in which leaders perceive the world. Some feel they live in a world that is safe and abundant, and thus they see others as potential collaborators and partners. Others feel that they live in a world characterized by scarcity and danger, and thus they see other actors as competitors or threats. Others still (likely the majority of entrepreneurs) find themselves somewhere in between these extremes. This difference in perception significantly influences the extent to which any leader can collaborate, form partnerships, create networks, see the larger picture, envision big ideas, and so on.



Tips for Supporters:

- Deepening awareness requires a different approach compared to transferring knowledge. Here it is about supporting social entrepreneurs with consistent practices and experiences that allow them to develop stronger awareness. We recommend using frameworks and tools that act as lenses or mirrors for leaders to look at themselves honestly and authentically and providing leaders with a safe non-judgmental space to reflect with others. Exposing leaders to different perspectives, mindsets and experiences ultimately helps to challenge their prevailing mental models. We also recommend offering a sliding scale of leadership coaching references (including low-bono and pro-bono offerings) for social entrepreneurs who are interested in additional support.
- As with all the principles, it is important to model the change we wish to see. Intermediaries should model the ways of leading, being, and operating that they intend to develop, support, or enable in their participants.

Resources:

- The [sensing journeys](#) developed by the Presencing Institute and the changemaking journey developed by Ashoka in the context of the [Visionary Program](#) help participants draw their changemaker journey and reflect in peer-groups on the inflection points of their life.
- We often use this [iceberg model](#) to help leaders become aware of how they can influence the kind of change they are trying to achieve in the world. This exercise also helps to deepen leaders' self-awareness.
- Our coaching circles focus on creating diverse, non-judgmental groups that support inquiry and reflection, and on choosing open-ended questions that challenge leaders to self-reflect.
- We often use the 4 levels of listening developed by the Presencing Institute to explain the power of deep listening as a leadership skill and the influence it has on leadership and collaboration. This [8 minute video](#) from the Presencing Institute explains the 4 levels of listening as a core skill. It also has an [assessment tool](#) that helps users to practice listening. We highly recommend these stakeholder [interviews](#), also developed by Presencing Institute, which support leaders to practice their deep listening skills in a way that informs their strategy.
- 360 Feedback is a process that compiles feedback from direct reports, colleagues, and managers, as well as self-evaluation by the employee themselves.
- Selected leadership development programs that focus on seeing differently to think and do differently: <https://www.aberkyn.com/en/>; <https://www.mobiusleadership.com/>; Ashoka Europe's Fellowship Program at <https://fellowship-europe.ashoka.org/story/new-leadership>

“89% of Fellows report that Ashoka changed how they see themselves as a leader. Of these, 94% report that they are leading differently as a consequence”

The Unlonely Planet - Global Impact Study, 2018

Principle 2: Support leaders to be open and willing to be changed by others

Galvanizing collective changemaking requires being open to learning from, and integrating, their perspectives and contributions into a problem or solution. It requires relinquishing complete control and letting go of attachment to our ideas. In order to do this, leaders must be able to pay full attention to the present moment, suspend their judgment, trust the process, and remain open to receiving new information – whether pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. Only then can they gain a deep understanding of what is happening and truly co-create a solution.

Invite social entrepreneurs to explore and reflect on where and how they can relinquish control over aspects of their idea, their solution, or their vision in a way that leaves space for others to meaningfully contribute. This can be part of a leadership learning journey or workshop, or it can be included in strategy discussions, particularly if leaders recognise that resistance or fear is preventing them from engaging stakeholders effectively.

This can be a difficult process, and it requires a capacity for openness and trust. It is important to support entrepreneurs to let go of cynicism, remain compassionate and empathetic to others' experiences, and let go of control and of fear so that they can embrace the complexity and discomfort of a shared journey.



Tips for Supporters:

- Include open questions like ‘what do you need to let go of?’ and ‘how might you let go constructively?’ that invite social entrepreneurs to explore and reflect on where and how they can let go of control.
- Share with social entrepreneurs how openness influences the power and potential of collaboration. Support them in becoming more aware of their judgements, their cynicism and fear, and the contexts in which they are open and closed to others.

Resources:

- Awareness practices are essential to support changemaking leaders in developing the capacity to be present and attentive to themselves and others. In addition to the resources in Principle 1, awareness practices such as mindfulness and meditation (including walking meditation or body scans) as well as exercises such as yoga and [embodiment](#) help social entrepreneurs to be present and aware of their mind, heart, and body.
- The [Theory U MOOC: Ulab](#) provides social entrepreneurs with tools that develop openness as a key interior condition for systems work and changemaking leadership. As well as the book [Theory U: Leading from the Emerging Future](#)
- A [Loving-kindness meditation](#) that helps leaders to expand their circle of compassion and kindness.

Principle 3: Support leaders to ignite the changemaking potential of others

Galvanizing others to be changemakers is a fundamental component of any approach to systems change. Enabling changemaking at all levels upends the power dynamics of a system and ensures that everyone is an active contributor in defining and co-creating a better future. This accelerates the transition towards more just, inclusive, self-organized, and resilient systems – where no one is left behind. Leadership and changemaking ability are not limited by age, experience, authority, race, gender, ability, and any other characteristic.

Social entrepreneurs see the innate ability for changemaking in everyone and seek to ignite this potential. They do not see communities as beneficiaries that need to be empowered, as this assumes that they have power only if someone else gives it to them. Instead, social entrepreneurs see everyone as a powerful contributor and as the agent of their own lives.



At the individual level: Support social entrepreneurs to observe and reflect on their mental models around leadership and changemaking by questioning their basic assumptions and noticing their values, biases, and beliefs. Do they see the inherent potential and changemaking potential in everyone? If not, what is preventing them from doing so? This starts with becoming aware of the lenses through which leaders see the world.

Tips for Supporters:

- Support social entrepreneurs to challenge and question their mental models about changemaking – what they consider “right and wrong”. This work takes time and is often best done through a learning journey or with the help of a coach or mentor.
- Remember that change requires time. Working with our mental models could take longer than expected. Be patient and encourage your social entrepreneurs to be persistent and be patient as well.

At the team level: When it comes to collaboration models, there is no one size that fits all. Before deciding how to create and organize teams of changemakers, leaders should reflect on their goals, values, and context. These intentions should guide their decision-making and organizational design.

Another important approach to team design is to start from the inside out. Intermediaries can support social entrepreneurs and their teams to begin by looking at their culture, the individual values and competencies within their team or organization, and their communication practices, all of which are core enabling conditions for shared leadership.

Tips for Supporters:

- **Conflict Resolution and Non-Violent Communication/Feedback Training:** Support social entrepreneurs and their teams to develop a method of communicating that is compassionate and open to learning. Help social entrepreneurs develop a culture of changemaking in their teams and organizations.
- Engage social entrepreneurs’ leadership teams in your support programs. This is a great way of ensuring democratization of knowledge in the team and commitment from all parties to engage in a growth process together.

There's no doubt that the most important thing Ashoka did was to convince me that what I was doing was important, because I didn't think that way. I was just a little farmer on a very small scale and I mean if you'd said to me that I could do something to change agriculture in this country, I would have laughed at you because I didn't imagine for a moment that I could make any kind of impact at all. And I had to learn that. And it's great because now I know that every single person has got something that they can contribute to change lives.”

Ashoka Fellow, South Africa

At the ecosystem level: Remind social entrepreneurs that bringing compassionate empathy to their work is not enough. It is a great intention; however, it is incomplete. To create solutions, leaders must work *with* people and communities. Social entrepreneurship is not about working *for* people and communities as beneficiaries. If community members are not genuinely involved as changemakers in creating solutions, leaders run the risk of imposing a particular point of view or placing a dominant narrative over the real needs of individuals and groups from all parts of the system.

Tips for Supporters:

- Support social entrepreneurs to explore how they can include strategies that engage other stakeholders as changemakers/active contributors. [This social entrepreneur](#) shares their experience of how they activate communities as changemakers. [This report captures a few more examples.](#)
- Encourage social entrepreneurs to ask themselves: Who else do we need to engage to contribute to, and co-create, social change? How can I engage young people as co-creators in social change? How can I engage those experiencing the problem to co-create social change?

Resources:

- Reframing Journeys from Ashoka India: These are regular spaces (4 days each) for Fellows to step back and reframe the way they see themselves and their role in the ecosystem. Body movement and mindfulness practices are used to help entrepreneurs reframe the way they look at their challenges, explore their next move, and engage with the ecosystem. Ashoka India has also supported sessions led by Fellows, including “Living Well, Dying Well” by Dr. Suresh Kumar and “Balancing Personal & Professional Life” by Fellow Anu Wahklu.
- [Book](#) from Ashoka Fellow Jordan Kassalow on changemaker journeys.
- [Book](#) from Aaron Hurst on the Purpose Economy.
- Reinventing Organizations by Fredric Laloux have developed [various resources](#) that support organizations looking to integrate forms of shared leadership.
- Book New Work needs Inner Work. By Joana Breidenbach, Bettina Rollow.
- [Make your Team Feel Powerful](#). HBR.
- Keep [a few references](#) for organizational/team coaches that facilitate and challenge a real team to optimize the ways they work together and create impactful and meaningful results.
- [THNK School of Creative Leadership](#) designs and facilitates transformational in-person learning experiences to train and support global leaders.



Principle 4: Support leaders to unlock collective power in a diverse & inclusive way

The nature and strength of our relationships with those around us determines our ability to create effective and equitable change. No individual or organization can hold the entire change process; only the collective power and engagement of everyone in an ecosystem enables transformative social impact.

Social entrepreneurs establish accountability and legitimacy by actively engaging with a variety of actors in their fields—citizens, government bodies, non-profits, companies and more. Lasting, equitable change involves diverse collaborations that apply to all parts (and people) in the system. This kind of change cannot be imposed; it is unlocked when everyone in the ecosystem recognizes and steps into their power as a changemaker.

Recognizing the importance of strong relationships in the system often requires that teams and collaboratives organize in new ways. At Ashoka, we think of such relationships in the form of ‘team of teams’ – smart networks working together across organizational boundaries, driven and guided by a shared purpose. While each situation requires a different type of collaboration, common patterns often emerge. There is the need to grow appetite for emergent processes and longer-term approaches to collaboration.

At the individual level: Supporters can help social entrepreneurs to be as intentional as possible about the kind of multi-stakeholder collaboration models they co-create. Intermediaries can support social entrepreneurs to discern when and what kind of collaboration and engagement best serve their goals, context and needs.

At individual, team, and ecosystem level: Co-creation of this kind requires learning from and with others and integrating their perspectives and contributions. Crucially, relationships at all levels become stronger with greater diversity. To embrace and foster the strengths of diversity, equity, and inclusion – and to leverage those strengths for collaboration and co-creation – leaders and their teams must develop several essential skills and capacities mentioned in Principles 1 and 2. These include being able to listen deeply (listening to learn), engage openly, handle discomfort and uncertainty, and address unconscious biases, judgments, and assumptions. It is also essential to support leaders, teams, and collaboratives to develop cultural competency (learning about and with other cultures) and intercultural empathy.

In building more diverse and inclusive teams, leaders are often asked not only to acknowledge personal and collective hurt and trauma but also to find ways to heal. Leaders must be aware of the narratives and “how tos” used in their teams and ecosystems so they can notice when a dominant narrative is not useful for diversity and inclusion and when other narratives (from other cultures and ways of operating) are more appropriate. For example, Western culture has certain norms of professionalism and performance that do not apply to other geographies and cultures. Leaders must avoid imposing their own standards on communities that hold a different worldview (e.g., applying western understanding of systems thinking in a Native American community that already views the world as whole and interconnected and has their own ways of operating).



Tips for Supporters:

- We recommend that intermediaries commit to continually building their own cultural competence, deepening their awareness of cultural differences, and creating diverse and inclusive teams, collaboratives and learning communities. At Ashoka, we are intentionally committed to this process. In this long path of learning, our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion efforts have become institutional.
- Rather than promoting one collaboration model, support social entrepreneurs to become aware of the structural (outer) and cultural (inner) conditions that influence effective multi-stakeholder collaboration. Equip social entrepreneurs and their teams with mindsets and capacities that support collaboration and enable collective impact.



Resources:

- [Radical collaboration](#) is a helpful resource that outlines essential skills for leaders and teams that enhance their ability to be in relationships and to support the radical collaboration we need to solve complex problems we face.
- [Ashoka Europe's online course on leading powerful multi-stakeholder collaboration](#).
- CoCreative has developed [various multi-disciplinary tools](#) to support social entrepreneurs to [design change systems for collaboration innovation](#). We use the [5 Levels of Engagement](#) to support leaders in exploring the diverse ways they can collaborate and engage others in systems change work.
- We also use CoCreative's [4 Agendas in Collaborative Innovation](#) to support Leaders to more intentionally create the underlying conditions that facilitate collaboration. Another useful tool is [the 6 patterns of collaboration](#) which describes collaboration trends that can be leveraged towards more effective co-creation.
- There are [various resources](#) and [tools](#) to support the development of networks.
- John Kania and Mark Kramer of FSG – a mission-driven consulting firm – describe the emerging field of “collective impact” in their influential [article](#) in the Stanford Social Innovation Review. The concept further evolved in resonance with social movements research (e.g., see the article [Collective Impact 3.0](#)).
- In many multi-stakeholder collaborations, it can be useful to have a backbone organization. To bring awareness to this structure and explain when it best supports collaboration goals, Stanford Social Innovation Review has created a list of [proven practices for Backbone Organizations](#).
- [The Philosophical Aspects of Cultural Difference](#) by Dr. Edwin Nichols is a matrix to help develop insight into cultural ways of knowing, being, and doing work in teams and collaboratives. It can be used to build teams and collaboratives based on cultural strengths.
- Tema Okun has prepared a [diagnostic and reflection tool](#) that supports leaders, teams, and collaboratives to explore the dominant value systems that drive their collaboration practices.
- A powerful tool that proves how more diverse groups are more effective and impactful in the long term is the book: [The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools, and Societies](#) by Scott Page. This can be a valuable resource for leaders looking to leverage diversity.

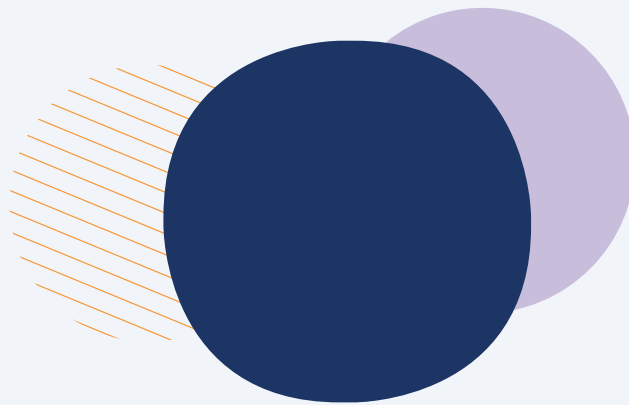
Example 1: Inside Ashoka

The Ashoka Europe Fellowship is a leadership and strategy development program designed for leading social entrepreneurs. It seeks to collect learnings from the Ashoka universe and integrate them into a core co-learning space for leading social entrepreneurs and their teams in a way that supports them to accelerate their impact. It is designed with practitioners for practitioners. The program has 6 co-learning modules that social entrepreneurs can access as they define their learning development priorities.

This includes a co-learning module on new leadership, which aims to support systemic leaders to reflect, question, innovate, and deepen the ways of leading, organizing, and being that are required to transform systems and mindsets.

- Through the new leadership co-learning module, the Ashoka Europe Fellowship collaborates with various social entrepreneurs and practitioners to define different online and offline learning experiences to support changemaking leaders.
- The modules are purposely designed as co-learning experiences to ensure that facilitators and participants co-create the learning experience. This also enriches the learnings and content of the modules, which are continually evolving.
- The Fellowship partners with various Ashoka Fellows as well as field leaders and practitioners in leadership development. Examples include Presencing Institute, CoCreative and the Wellbeing Project.
- Over the last 3 years the program has tested a range of learning experiences that focus on developing specific skills, such as facilitating multi-stakeholder collaboration and igniting the changemaking potential and collective power of teams and organizations. It has also hosted retreats that support social entrepreneurs to examine what holds them back and what activates their potential. Participants are supported to develop their self-awareness and openness as leaders, as well as essential skills such as deep listening, empathy, and trust.
- Ashoka staff members are also part of these learning experiences, which allow them to deepen their own leadership capacity and develop the skills to hold these spaces.

Variations of these learning spaces have also been developed across Latin America, South East Asia, South Asia, and Africa. Each Fellowship team works together to share their experience and learnings. The program that has been developed in Europe is a result of the practices and lessons sourced from around the world.



“To me, this impact leadership training is the best Ashoka can offer to its Fellows, this is really perceived as the true added value of the network. I am more conscious of the role I have to play as a leader of systems transformation.”

Participant of Fellowship Europe Program

Example 2: The Presencing Institute



MIT Sloan School of Management Senior Lecturer Otto Scharmer and colleagues cofounded the [Presencing Institute \(PI\)](#) to create an action research platform at the intersection of science, consciousness, and profound social and organizational change. One of their key contributions to the world is Theory U. Theory U is a process and change framework with a set of methodologies to address the world's most pressing global challenges while also supporting the leadership development and capacity building of changemakers around the world.

During the past two decades, Theory U has evolved and been expanded through the learning, practice, applications and prototypes of thousands of organizations and communities worldwide. This work has become foundational support to thousands of changemakers and leaders from across sectors to a) step into awareness-based leadership, b) find ways to enable everyone to be a changemaker and contribute to the greater good and c) find novel approaches and solutions in navigating an era of unprecedented disruption and potential for transformation. A founding principle for their work is the link between inner and outer work: "The success of an intervention depends on the interior condition of the intervenor."

They do this through immersive and transformational journeys (a few examples listed below), which are intentionally and carefully designed learning spaces for co-creation and collective action. This is reflected in the last 5 years, where PI's reach has grown from having a small community of a few thousands to hundreds of thousands in more than 185 countries.

- The [Theory U MOOC: Ulab](#) provides social entrepreneurs with tools that develop openness as a key interior condition for systems work and changemaking leadership [Theory U: Leading from the Emerging Future](#)
- GAIA Journey: an online, multi-local/global learning infrastructure, created in response to the Covid-19 epidemic and the call for action on climate change, that has mobilized thousands of people to reimagine and reshape the future that we want to embody and enact, both individually and collectively in the face of this global crisis.
- Societal Transformation Lab: the annual cycle of capacity-building and innovation, taking learners and changemakers through a process of systems thinking and analysis, to identify and prototype actions to bring about transformational change.
- Ubuntu Lab: an innovation and change program by and for African citizens to develop openness as a key interior condition for systems work and changemaking leadership and to develop initiatives for their community, organisation, country or Africa as a whole.
- SDG Leadership Lab in partnership with the United Nations, a series of Labs to support UN Country Teams to activate their collective potential to achieve the SDGs.



“In this new context for leadership, strategic communication will help to organize an ongoing conversation which ultimately will lead everyone as an active player into a collaborative journey of mindset transformation. This is the path to turn everyone into a changemaker. Leadership in the age of social networks is above all someone who understands the conversational nature of human society and the communicative nature of organizations.”

Ricardo Neves, Ashoka Fellow, Brazil, author of the book “Sensemaking: Leadership for Purpose – Strategic Communication for a World of Exponential Complexity”

Wellbeing

How do I relate to and take care of myself in order to achieve systems change?

RATIONALE

Why is wellbeing important for achieving systems change?

It's a simple truth: If I am not well, I cannot do well. We need to take care of ourselves. Lasting social change can only happen if we are well, self-aware, and healthy. Along with a growing number of initiatives and publications, our work demonstrates that wellbeing is an essential element of entrepreneurial support. In fact, we have found a direct correlation between a social entrepreneur's wellbeing and their capability to contribute to the greater good. In this section, we want to offer supporters of social entrepreneurs our perspective on wellbeing and our learnings on how to effectively integrate wellbeing into support programs.

Before diving into principles, we will first outline four core beliefs that underpin our understanding of wellbeing:

1. Wellbeing is subjective and interdependent.

Wellbeing is different for everyone. We view wellbeing as a condition or state of balance between the various dimensions that make us human – mental, emotional, physical, social, environmental, energetic, and transcendental. Our holistic view of wellbeing also considers the relationship between individual, societal and planetary wellbeing.

Holistic wellbeing happens in relationships and in community. My wellbeing, the wellbeing of others, and the wellbeing of our planet are all intimately interconnected; one cannot exist without the other. Whether we realize it or not, we all impact each other's wellbeing.

2. Wellbeing is a personal systems change strategy.

Self-care is not an act of selfishness or self-indulgence, but rather one of self-preservation. In a sector often driven by the notion of sacrifice and defined by limited resources, self-care is a radical act and a critical mindset shift. In fact, self-care is a system change strategy, an “act of political warfare,” as civil rights activist Audre Lorde put it.

“I understood that working on self is not being self-centric. In fact, it is the most unique and beautiful gift to oneself and everyone around.”

Kabir Vajpeyi, Ashoka Fellow

3. Wellbeing creates inner space.

The success of a leader hinges on their ability to adapt their mindsets and skills to the changing environment, to listen deeply to let go of past conceptions and embrace new ones, and to be comfortable with constant change. The ongoing process of noticing and responding to a changing landscape can be stressful and demanding. When we are stressed and unwell, we listen less, reflect little, and make poorer decisions. Wellbeing creates the necessary space for openness, effective listening, reflection, and informed decision making. Leaders who cultivate their wellbeing can be more present for themselves and for others, enhancing their ability to perceive what the system needs and wants.

4. Wellbeing means resilience.

Perhaps the most common reason for prioritizing wellbeing is resilience. Change – especially long-term systems change – is taxing. If we mismanage our emotional and physical resources, we are likely to run out of steam on the long and winding journey towards change, especially during times of stress and hardship.



System change is a marathon, not a sprint.

PRINCIPLES

As a supporter of social entrepreneurs and changemakers, the following principles will help you integrate wellbeing into your support programs:

Principle 1: Support leaders in making wellbeing a priority

The first step to improving wellbeing is simply recognizing its importance and making it a personal and professional priority. Wellbeing is critical for social entrepreneurs because it influences the quality and magnitude of their impact. As we mentioned in the leadership section, how we show up affects our ability to effectively implement systems change strategies. Equally, how we take care of ourselves influences how we show up. Our inner wellbeing and outer actions are connected; what we do in the world reflects our inner conditions, and what we have not healed in ourselves shows up in the solutions we create.

On a behavioural level, we can observe common patterns when our wellbeing suffers: we might become reactive, impatient, or uninspired.

On a strategic level, we risk creating solutions that reflect our own suffering and thereby harm others.

On a personal level, lack of wellbeing can create a disconnect between our actions and our values. Each of us has a responsibility to act in a way that reflects our values and our vision for the world. When social entrepreneurs fail to live out their values and mission – to the extent possible and reasonable in the present – their vision and work become less credible, less authentic, and less impactful.

Moreover, wellbeing enhances openness and authenticity – key competences for collaboration. When leaders are open to other perspectives and can accept themselves and others, there is space to build trust. Finally, wellbeing prevents burnout, which is reaching crisis levels in the citizen sector: research by the Wellbeing Project demonstrates that changemakers are experiencing increasing levels of burnout and stress, high rates of depression and chronic illness, and distress within personal and professional relationships. For those working in helping professions such as nursing, medicine, and teaching, these challenges are often even more pronounced due to the relational and emotional intensity of their work. Empathy requires resilience.

A 2010 study conducted on 10,000 non-profit professionals found that more than 90% of respondents regarded burnout as the principal reason for leaving the sector. A survey conducted by Unite on people employed by charities and NGOs found that 42% of respondents believed that their job was detrimental to their mental health.

A 2016 study conducted by the British Association of Social Workers and Community Care found that 57% of respondents resorted to emotional eating and 35% used alcohol to cope with work-related stress. In addition to this, 63% of respondents had difficulties sleeping, 56% said that they were emotionally exhausted, and 35% felt unable to cope at work.

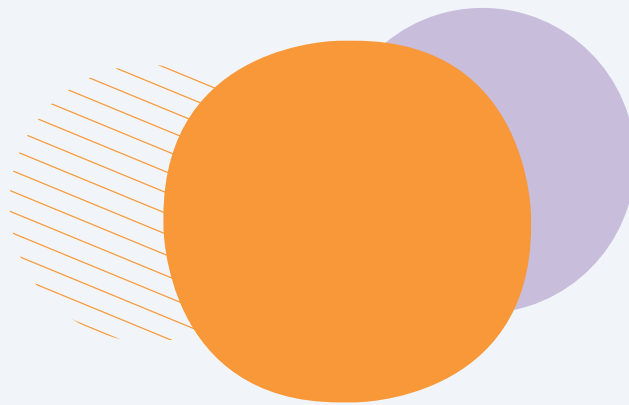


Tips for Supporters & Intermediaries:

- Invest time in noticing, experiencing, and understanding the effects of wellbeing on the impact of leaders and teams. If possible, collect evidence of the impact of wellbeing support to help make the case about why wellbeing is strategic for social change.
- Integrate wellbeing (workshops, practices, conversations) into your programming, strategy, and leadership development work. You can start as easy as doing a “wellbeing bazar” – ask participants what they do to take care of themselves, have them paint it on a flipchart, and invite them to share it with the group. The wellbeing tips of participants constitute a powerful toolbox of experiences, practices, and inspiration.

Resources:

- [The Wellbeing Project Research](#)
- [Ashoka Latin America Report on Fellows' Wellbeing in Spanish](#)
- Stepping Up or Stepping out - A Report on the Readiness of Next Generation Non-profit Leaders, 2010.
- [Article](#): Charity workers suffering an epidemic of mental health issues and stress, survey reveals.
- [Article](#): How stress impacts social workers – and how they're trying to cope.



“I really feel that Ashoka looked at the problem I solved through my eyes, instead of looking at the problem and then trying to find someone who fit that problem or fit that solution. I think if today I wasn’t a Fellow, I definitely wouldn’t be where I am right now. I would probably still be dealing with mental battles of should I keep on going or should I stop?”

Ashoka Fellow, Mexico

Principle 2: Support leaders to be authentic – showing up and embracing others as true whole selves

The 'Paradoxical Theory of Change' teaches us that "when I accept myself as I am, then I can change" (Carl Rogers, American psychologist and among the founders of the humanistic approach to psychology). This means practicing loving acceptance of who and what we are in the current moment, with a recognition of the fact that only from that place of loving acceptance can real growth begin. Learning and development spaces that are free from judgment can help us to let go of the layers we build up to protect ourselves and express vulnerability and authenticity.

Authenticity and wellbeing reinforce each other. Wellbeing helps us to be more authentic and being authentic improves our wellbeing. This virtuous cycle can only begin, however, when we learn to love and accept ourselves. As Antonia Ariza Montes and his co-authors explain in a recent publication, "Authenticity generates wellbeing by providing individuals with a clear and concise sense of themselves. In contrast, the absence of authenticity provokes disorientation and dissatisfaction since individuals might be forced to act against their innermost values and aspirations."

A body of research shows that authenticity is associated with positive social relationships and can act as a buffer against interpersonal conflict. In her book *Love 2.0: How Our Supreme Emotion Affects Everything We Feel, Think, Do, and Become*, Dr. Barbara Fredrickson demonstrates that our capacity for connection is linked to our health and longevity.

Furthermore, a series of studies over the past few decades show that suppressing emotions can and does affect our physical and mental health. A 2013 study by the Harvard School of Public Health and the University of Rochester found that people who bottled up their emotions increased their likelihood of premature death by more than 30%, with



their risk of being diagnosed with cancer increasing by 70%. In some cases, social change leaders choose to suppress their feelings so they can 'continue working' or 'continue fighting for the cause,' or because they don't have safe, non-judgmental spaces to share and process their emotions. Without appropriate support, this behaviour becomes unsustainable. Wellbeing conversations, exercises, and support spaces can help to prevent and mitigate this problem.



Tips for Supporters:

- Create and hold confidential safe spaces that allow social entrepreneurs to cultivate connection and inner development and practice being vulnerable.
- Create spaces where participants hold space for each other. By holding space, we simply mean being present for someone without judgment. This requires donating your ears and heart without wanting anything back, practicing empathy and compassion, and accepting the person's truth.

Resources:

- We invite participants to support each other by integrating [peer coaching circles](#) in our programs.
- [Book](#): James J. Gross Ricardo F. Muñoz. Emotion Regulation and Mental Health.
- [Report](#): Lucy E Cousins. February 2018.

Principle 3: Teach leaders that wellbeing requires an integral approach that recognises and attends to multiple factors.

Wellbeing depends on the interaction and balance between the mental, emotional, physical, social, spiritual and energy elements of our being and on the satisfaction of fundamental human needs. As such, cultivating wellbeing requires an integral and individualized approach.

When explaining our holistic view of wellbeing, we often rely on Manfred Max-Neef's fundamental human needs model and Ken Wilber's Integral framework. The graphs below depict these two models and demonstrate the key factors that shape wellbeing. On the one hand, the model on fundamental human needs shows nine needs that manifest across four dimensions – being, having, doing, and interacting. Each of these nine needs – subsistence, protection, affection, understanding, participation, idleness, creation, identity – can be fulfilled in a variety of ways. On the other hand, the Integral Model shows various dimensions in which we manifest our humanity – mental & emotional, behavioural, culture, systems – at the individual and collective levels.

These two models help us to notice the complexity and interconnectedness of the variables that create our subjective wellbeing. They also serve as a critical reminder that our human experience is not confined to the cognitive/mental realm, and that there are other important realms that we often ignore. In order to truly thrive, we must care about every aspect of our humanity.

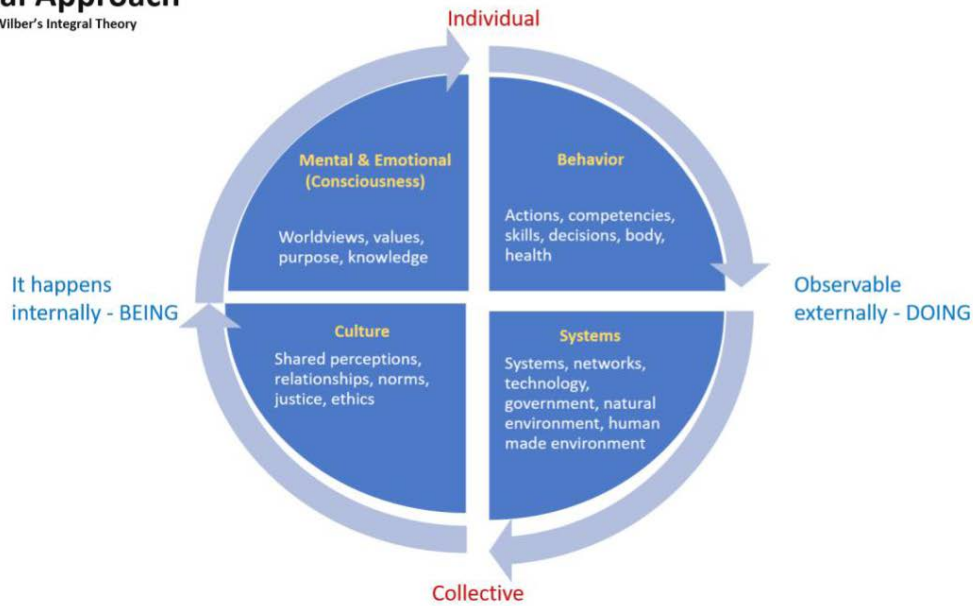
Tools:

To make it easier for our social entrepreneurs to design their wellbeing plans, we have created our own framework out of the two models explained above. We have chosen nine key areas that we consider fundamental for wellbeing: mental, physical, emotional, transcendence, contribution, relationships & community, livelihood, nature, and social/cultural context. We help our leaders identify areas from this framework that they want to nurture and then connect them with resources to facilitate their development.

Throughout this process, we invite leaders to rely not only on their cognitive capacity but also on other ways of knowing and learning, including other intelligences connected with intuition, sensing, and feeling. Creating coherence using multiple intelligences further reinforces wellbeing by establishing a sense of alignment, centeredness, and balance.

Integral Approach

Based on Ken Wilber's Integral Theory



Human Needs Matrix After Manfred Max-Neef

	Being	Having	Doing	Interacting
Subsistence	Health, adaptability Sense of humour	Food, shelter, work	Feed, procreate, rest, work	Social setting, environment
Protection	Care, equilibrium, solidarity	Rights, social security, family	Cooperate, plan, help	Living space, dwelling
Affection	Self-esteem, respect, passion	Friendships, family, relation with nature	Make love, share, cultivate, appreciate	Privacy, intimacy, home, togetherness
Understanding	Critical conscience, curiosity, discipline	Literature, education teachers	Investigate, meditate experiment,	Groups, community, schools, family
Participation	Dedication, respect, receptiveness	Rights, responsibility duties, work	Cooperate, dissent, agree on, interact	Associations, churches, family
Idleness	Curiosity, tranquillity, imagination	Peace of mind, games, parties	Day-dream, relax remember, brood	Privacy, intimacy, free time, landscape
Creation	Passion, intuition, imagination,	Abilities, skills, method, work	Work, invent, build, compose, design	Productive settings, workshops, time
Identity	Sense of belonging, self-esteem	Language, symbols, religion, values	Commit oneself, grow, recognise	Social rhythms, maturation stages
Freedom	Autonomy, boldness, passion	Equal rights	Dissent, choose, disobey, run risks	Temporal/ spatial plasticity

Tips for Supporters:

- Create time and space for social entrepreneurs to reflect, learn about their basic needs, and identify wellbeing areas that they can nurture to strengthen their overall wellbeing.

Resources:

- We use the [human needs model](#) by Manfred Max-Neef as a baseline to identify the wellbeing needs that are our leaders are and are not meeting.
- The integral approach enables social entrepreneurs to connect their being (inner wellbeing) with their doing (system change).
- Ashoka's nine wellbeing areas (mental, physical, emotional, transcendence, contribution, relationships & community, livelihood, nature and social/ cultural context) can be used to create developmental plans with respective resources and timelines.

Principle 4: Help leaders see that wellbeing builds on self-awareness and self-development.

In order to cultivate wellbeing, leaders must learn to be present, to observe what is happening to, with, and around them, and to respond appropriately. As we discover and evaluate our inner wellbeing, we need to be comfortable holding space for ourselves and processing our inputs, sensations, emotions, and experiences without denying, dismissing, or judging them. Only then can we develop a holistic development journey for ourselves.

In this process, it is important to be compassionate and gentle. Awareness without judgement can be challenging. We must approach ourselves with kindness as we face the discomfort, confusion, and self-judgement that can emerge as we get to know ourselves.

The process of building an effective development journey should be approached holistically. A great way to create these journeys is to offer experiential learning that integrates head, heart, and hands and that helps leaders to work not only with their cognitive intelligence but also with their intuition, sensing ability, and feelings. This means offering social entrepreneurs a space to connect with mind, body, and emotions, and to express their creativity in new ways. This can include areas like emotion coaching, somatic work, and the use of art for creativity and development (a.k.a. social arts).

Development journeys also help leaders to understand the ways in which they have been shaped by their early childhood years, their cultural upbringing, and the environment in which they live. These processes can result in deep healing and often improve the leaders' capacity to integrate parts of themselves that have been ignored or suppressed, creating a sense of coherence that leads to wellbeing.



Tips for Supporters & Intermediaries:

- Support participants to recognize that self-awareness and personal development may feel uncomfortable and destabilizing at times, given the inner change that they require.
- Provide coaching support to help participants along their developmental journeys.
- Some personal development journeys may require healing (at physical, emotional, and mental levels). When necessary, encourage participants to seek external support.

Principle 5: Support leaders in enhancing their deep sense of meaning.

Connecting with purpose enhances our sense of meaning, our self-worth, and our wellbeing. Working towards social good inherently creates a sense of meaning, especially when there is strong alignment between personal and professional purposes. Self-worth also increases when work happens in a giving manner. A body of research shows that one of the reasons people get stuck in the cycle of low self-esteem is because they are overly focused on themselves and what they are lacking. In contrast, according to research by Jennifer Crocker and Amy Canevello from University of Michigan “Nothing makes you prouder of yourself than knowing that you are making a positive difference in the lives of other people.” In many cases, when leaders enable other changemakers, they not only generate greater impact but also improve personal and collective wellbeing.

As supporters, it is important to remember that along the challenging path towards change, leaders may lose sight of their purpose. Helping them regain a connection to purpose is critical because it allows them to shift their perspective from ‘having to work’ (seeing work as an obligation), to connecting with ‘why I work’ (what gives them energy and motivation).

Tips for Supporters:

- Create learning journeys that encourage social entrepreneurs to reflect, connect with, and clarify their sense of purpose.
- Coaching support can help social entrepreneurs to discern whether they are doing their work out of a sense of obligation or because they feel truly called to it.

Resources:

- [Ikigai](#) is a tool that helps participants reflect on their personal purpose.
- Vision Quests can also help leaders connect with their personal purpose. This resource lists a range of available [Vision Quests](#).
- [The Purpose Economy: How Your Desire for Impact, Personal Growth and Community Is Changing the World](#).
- [Purpose programs and coaching](#) offered by Alexander Inchbald.



Photo credit: Ashoka

Example 1: Wellbeing Initiatives at Ashoka

We have created a range of wellbeing offerings for Ashoka Fellows, staff members, and other members of our network. This has allowed us to deepen our exploration of a) the correlation between wellbeing and the ability to galvanize others as changemakers and b) the respective inner work and self-care required for all social entrepreneurs and changemakers to do this sustainably. Our inquiry has led us to recognize that when leaders consciously establish their leadership in order to enable other changemakers, it not only generates greater impact, but also helps them to cultivate personal and collective wellbeing.

We also recognize that a leader's ability to inspire and support others is inextricably linked to and shaped by his or her inner development. We aim to help social entrepreneurs and changemakers to embody the wellbeing through our wellbeing activities and offerings:

Being-Well Retreats for Ashoka Fellows and Staff

As part of our Fellowship support, we offer wellbeing retreats for Ashoka Fellows and staff. These retreats enable participants to embody authenticity, show up as themselves, build self-awareness, and acquire an integral view of wellbeing. Depending on availability, Ashoka Fellows can also access further support through Ashoka's pro bono coaching partners.

Wellbeing Toolkit

We have created an external [wellbeing toolkit](#) accessible via our website, as well as an internal wellbeing microsite where Ashoka staff members can access resources to support individual and team wellbeing. Staff members also have access to pro-bono coaching to support their development.

Online Offerings

We offer digital workshops, conversations, dialogues and learning journeys for leaders, teams and organizations. These online offerings raise awareness about the importance of wellbeing and provide social entrepreneurs and their teams with frameworks, tools, and resources.

Supporting and Working with Others in the Field

In times of crisis, it becomes especially important to support others. In recent months, we have collaborated with the Wellbeing Project and a number of co-creators to advance two wellbeing initiatives:

- 1) The Wellbeing Series is a powerful space where hundreds of changemakers gather to learn, practice and be with each other.
- 2) We will launch a digital service to help changemakers access coaching support at pro bono rates.

Weekly Mindfulness for Social Innovation

We host a 30-minute mindfulness session each week for everyone in our network. Led by an Ashoka Fellow and a Zen priest, this practice has become a place of refuge and nourishment for participants

Building Resilience Community of Practice

Due to the COVID-19 crisis, we launched a community of practice on resilience for Ashoka Fellows and staff. The intention of the space is to enable participants to develop the capacity and ability to work and lead effectively during difficult times.

Example 2: The Wellbeing Project (TWP)



- Co-created by Ashoka, the Esalen Institute, Porticus, Impact Hub, the Skoll Foundation and the Synergos Institute, the Wellbeing Project is focused on catalyzing a culture of inner wellbeing for all changemakers. The Project is structured in four pillars: Model Programs: Programs that explore personal and organizational wellbeing.
- Research & Evaluation: Rigorous research around wellbeing programs and their effectiveness.
- Learning, Convening & Enabling: Interactive gatherings where key constituencies in the field of social change discuss the research and learn from each other.
- Storytelling & Connecting: A multimedia media campaign sharing stories from across The Wellbeing Project with the field.

TWP has focused their work on raising global awareness about the importance of prioritizing wellbeing. Through their program, they have also deepened the understanding that wellbeing:

- starts with authenticity - accepting and showing up as ourselves.
- requires an integral approach that recognizes and attends to all wellbeing factors.
- builds on self-awareness and self-development: sensing, understanding, and working on ourselves.
- is enhanced the more we connect and stay connected with our purpose.

TWP conducted a three-year study to document the journeys of the changemakers who participated in their 18-month program on inner development. As they describe in their report, “The research findings validated our initial hypothesis – inner wellbeing translates to a better and healthier relationship with self, one’s social environment and one’s work.”

The report also describes their key design principles for a learning journey, which include:

- **Journey-oriented:** Understand inner development work as unique to each person, multidimensional, multifaceted, and ongoing.
- **Invitational:** Invite people to take part in inner development work while allowing them the freedom to choose how to participate and engage.
- **Welcoming of the whole person:** Place individuals, not their work, at the centre. Invite participants to engage without premeditated expectations about personal or professional outcomes.
- **Nurturing Commitment:** Create opportunities for the discovery and integration of capacity-building practices and experiences that support enhanced self-care.
- **Facilitating depth:** Provide a variety of therapeutic and/or healing modalities and opportunities within consistent, coherent and useful inner development frameworks.
- **Meaningful frameworks:** Trustworthy, credible, and skilled staff create and hold a sacred, confidential transformational process.

“To responsibly and effectively bring change into the world, we need to develop the capacity to lead ourselves; “Know Thyself” is the oldest advice out there. However, ‘knowing thyself’ doesn’t mean only focusing on inner work. Changemaking from the ‘inside out’ is never a linear process: that you first have to change inside before creating meaningful change out in the world. Instead, the goal is deepening self-awareness while in action, through a continuous process of action and reflection.”

Ilaina Rabbat and Roshan Paul,
Amani Institute Co-Founders.

Conclusions

In this guide we aimed to share our insights into supporting social entrepreneurs most effectively on their challenging path towards just and lasting change, i.e., systems change which engages everyone as a changemaker.

We focused on three key features that we have observed among highly successful social entrepreneurs and made core priorities of our global support program: **system change strategy, changemaking leadership, and wellbeing.**

On the right, we provide an overview of these three essential features and the respective design principles for effective support programs. For each feature we also repeat the central reflection question for social entrepreneurs.



System Change Strategy

How do I design strategies to achieve the desired system change?

Principle 1: Think holistically, not mechanistically

Principle 2: Map systems to the extent that it's useful for your work

Principle 3: Include multiple perspectives

Principle 4: Unleash dormant energy

Changemaking Leadership

How do I inspire myself, members of my team, and others in the ecosystem to step into their power and contribute to systems change?

Principle 1: Support leaders to see that they are part of the system they want to change – and to strengthen awareness of their mental models and worldviews

Principle 2: Support leaders to be open and willing to be changed by others

Principle 3: Support leaders to ignite the changemaking potential of others

Principle 4: Support leaders to unlock collective power in a diverse and inclusive way

Wellbeing

How do I relate to and take care of myself in order to achieve systems change?

Principle 1: Support leaders in making wellbeing a priority.

Principle 2: Support leaders to be authentic - to show up and embrace others as true whole selves.

Principle 3: Teach leaders that wellbeing requires an integral approach that recognises and attends to multiple factors.

Principle 4: Help leaders to see that wellbeing builds on self-awareness and self-development

Principle 5: Support leaders in enhancing their deep sense of meaning.

We hope you found useful insights in this report to further advance your work in supporting social entrepreneurs. We aimed to share our current understanding of the three features and their design principles, which we regard as essential elements of effective support and key skills for highly successful social entrepreneurs. Our understanding will certainly keep evolving over time, and more research is needed to fully understand these features and their impact. As previously discussed, our learnings derive not only from our own observations of working with social entrepreneurs but also from many other inspiring organisations and leaders in the field. We hope that this work sparks more conversation and knowledge exchange about effective support for social entrepreneurship. We very much welcome any learnings, feedback, and ideas from you. Change remains challenging as ever but if we all share our learnings and support each other along this path, our chances of shared success grow exponentially.





“Perhaps in its most profound form, systems leadership is about creating the conditions in which everyone can work together and learn together to thrive together. By adopting new (and sometimes ancient) mindsets and methods, system leaders can weave powerful collaborations and communities that are continuously evolving towards universal wellbeing.”

Ross Hall, Co-Lead Learning Societies, Jacobs Foundation

Resources

Recommended resources and references from the text.

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“System change has been and will still be one of the main mindsets that individuals and societies need to have in order to thrive. The imperative of this topic has been brought to simplicity by this excellent “craftsmanship”. A very practical and thought-provoking report.”

Adnane Addioui, Founder of MCISE and Tamkeen Initiative (MENA), Ashoka Fellow, Morocco

Authors

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Partners and Teams

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Supporting System Changers

*The role of system thinking,
leadership and wellbeing*



Please reach out to us for any feedback, learnings, or other insights that you would like to share.
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