



TRANSFORMATIVE SPACES

Cultivating conditions for transformative change

THE WHY

Halfway through the 2030 Agenda, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are not being achieved fast enough. Following the 75th anniversary of the United Nations, amid the COVID pandemic (2020), Member States requested the Secretary-General (SG) to report back with recommendations to “advance our common agenda and respond to current and future challenges” ([UN75 declaration - A/RES/75/1](#)).

“Humanity has shown time and time again that it is capable of great achievements when we work together. This common agenda is our road map to recapture this positive spirit and begin rebuilding our world and mending the trust in one another we need so desperately at this moment in history.”¹

The SG’s recommendations outlined in the report [Our Common Agenda](#) (2021) included an “upgraded UN that is fit for a new era and can offer more relevant, system-wide, multilateral and multi-stakeholder solutions to the challenges of the 21st century.”

“UN 2.0 is about strengthening our expertise and culture in data, digital, innovation, foresight, and behavioural science – to build a UN System that can better support Member States in the years to come.” - António Guterres

We know however transformative change (of culture, ways of thinking and working and mindsets for positive systems change) is not easy – nor linear.

Achieving transformative change in today’s complex and interconnected world requires connecting deeply to ourselves and others, understanding the systems and relationships we are a

part of and creating spaces for all stakeholders to come together to rethink, reimagine and co-create new possibilities and futures that benefit **all**. It requires the practical application of participatory and inclusive practices to real-world problems, that emphasize continuous learning and adaptation.

The **current multilateral system** is our avenue for collaboration and dialogue across the multitude of cultures in our world. It is a system that has evolved over 75+ years and now more than ever we need to accelerate that evolution. We must bear in mind that “culture” is not static it has many layers – visible and invisible – in countries, communities and organisations.

Cultivating a collective organisation culture across and from a multiplicity of cultures is complex. It requires thinking, working and connecting in more inclusive ways and adapting new mindsets that enable change.

“In a rapidly evolving world, culture is the linchpin of every successful organizational adaptation.” [UN 2.0](#) Policy Brief

In the [Pact for the Future \(Rev 2\)](#), Member States recognize that “culture offers people and communities a strong sense of identity and fosters social cohesion” and that they will protect and promote culture and sport as an integral component of sustainable development.”²

The SG has called for “a form of multilateralism that is more networked, more inclusive and more effective in addressing twenty-first century challenges.”³

The UN system has many networks for transformation, leadership, learning and innovation, as well as communities of practice and teams at the regional and country level across multiple disciplines that have made significant progress in key areas. For example, UNDP’s system-wide initiative advancing awareness-based systems change for the

¹ Summary of Secretary-General’s Report “Our Common Agenda”

² Pact for the Future Rev.2, p. 9

³ Our Common Agenda - Report of the Secretary-General, 2021 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.21.1.8), p 6.



SDGs, the SDG Leadership Labs, gender equality, inclusion; and in other systems work such as food security, climate, education, health and more. However, not everyone has access to these networks or to the experience and knowledge of practices and tools and how they impact on results, teams and communities in our collective goals. Furthermore, bridging silos and overcoming fragmentation among networks can be challenging.

The premise of the Summit of the Future is driven by the “how”...

- How do we cooperate better to deliver on the agreed aspiration and goals?
- How do we better meet the needs of the present while also preparing for the challenges of the future?

To help address these questions, it is necessary to tap into the deeper sources of knowing, potential, capabilities and relationships. These are enablers for cultivating purpose, mindsets, behaviours, relationships and systems that foster solutions rooted in solidarity, learning, adaptation, regeneration and collective action.

So, how might we create conditions for a cultural transformation of the multilateral system to accelerate the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and ensure we can better prepare for and respond to future shocks?

To help achieve this ‘how’ collectively, we propose initiating ‘transformative spaces’ that cultivate these conditions for cultural transformation.

THE HOW

“Leaders and organizations must put in place supporting, learning infrastructures that embody the intended change and prevent getting sucked back into the old systems and behaviours.”

-Otto Sharmer, senior lecturer at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and co-founder of the Presencing Institute and its u-school for Transformation

“Transformative Spaces” is a collective initiative across UN partners that aims to support this by providing “safe and inclusive spaces for connection, dialogue, co-creation and transformation”.

These are intentional learning and co-creation workshops that integrate theory, practice and peer-to-peer learning to create the space (mental, emotional, physical) for participants to

- experience participatory, inclusive methods for approaching systemic challenges;
- share experiences and co-create ideas and solutions to those challenges; and
- provide connections for future support in their work and across existing networks.

Transformative Spaces seeks to democratize learning and access to tools, practices, and creative spaces to build a strong foundation for a forward-thinking and inclusive culture to accelerate the SDGs with all partners and stakeholders and to better support Member States.

It strives to help grow individual and collective capacity for transformational change on a systems level.

The emphasis is twofold:

1 Build collective leadership across the UN and its partners to cultivate conditions for change through the experience of inclusive, cutting-edge and holistic systems transformation practices applied across different environments and in different networks.

2 Put practices to work to build common ground on the most pressing global challenges. Topics will be identified and prioritized through system-wide surveys to ensure practical application and development of real-world case studies to be shared via rich, storytelling approaches. Strategic foresight and behavioural insights will also be leveraged going forward to anticipate new topics and accelerate systemic behaviour change.



Transformative Spaces will focus on the following levers to facilitate conditions for transformative change: **psychological safety, trust, inclusion, reflection, and deep listening.**

TRANSFORMATIVE SPACES

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#TransformingOurCulture

Inclusive leadership (...) is not just a moral imperative, but a strategic advantage that can accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

- ↑ 29% increase in team collaboration
- ↑ 20% improvement in decision-making

Deep Listening

Enhancing the quality of listening to understand multiple perspectives, transform mindsets, and co-create new intentions and ideas.

“ I sense the need for presence, for awareness, collaboration and operating in the realm of constant energy and light. ”

Inclusion

Using and valuing a diverse range of learning, thinking and communication processes that enable participation of all voices; acknowledges and equalizes differences in power and privilege; and reflects diversity of perspectives, intelligences, and knowledge.

“ I see a pathway for doing things differently. ”

Reflection

Encouraging regular reflection to continuously improve ourselves and the quality of our relationships.

“ I see a direction: toward human growth. ”

- ↑ 23% increase in performance after engaging in 15 minutes of reflection daily for 10 days

Trust

Building trust within teams, between different organizations, and amongst all stakeholders. “Trust is the willingness to be vulnerable based on expectations regarding another’s behaviors.”

“ I see an openness, a willingness to experiment, move with intuition, trust in each other. ”

- High trust teams outperform low trust teams by over 100%, high trust organizations outperform low trust organizations by around 300%.

Psychological Safety

Creating an environment where all participants feel safe to be themselves, express their ideas and concerns without fear of negative consequences. This has been shown to be one of the most essential conditions for transformational change and impact and is intertwined with fostering an inclusive workplace culture and well-being.

“ I sense immersion, networking and ownership. ”

- ↑ 20% increase in productivity
- ↑ 50% more ideas generated
- ↑ 25% more likely to collaborate effectively
- ↓ 10% reduction in decision-related errors

Lightbulb icon: Data from Google’s Project Aristotle (2010) indicates that psychological safety was key to having teams with higher rates of employee engagement and lower rates of staff turnover.

Lightbulb icon

UN SDG Leadership Labs have demonstrated that practicing reflection and deep listening are enablers.*

United Nations

SOURCES:

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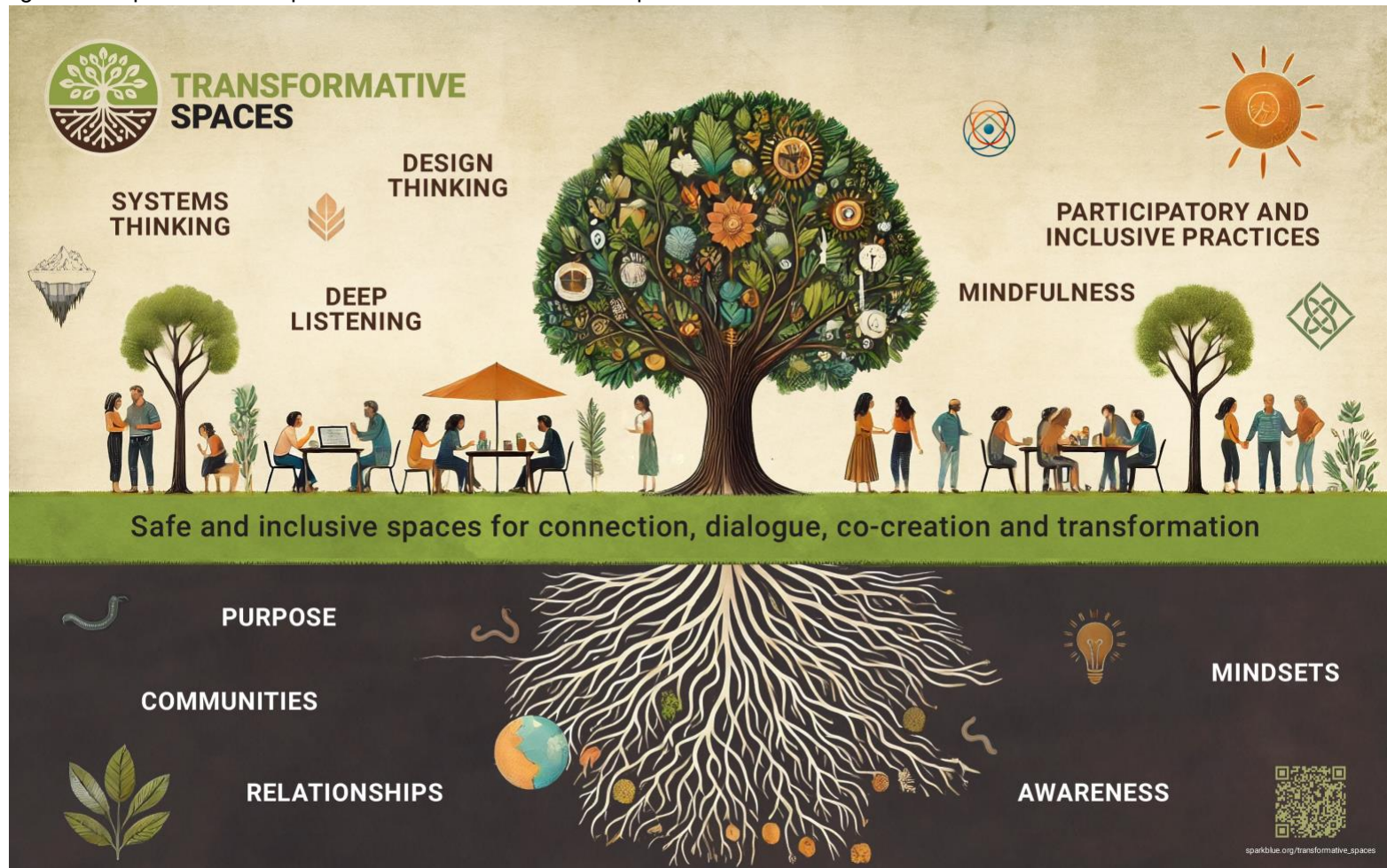
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CONCEPT VISUAL

The following visual depicts the concept and vision of Transformative Spaces:



TRANSFORMATIVE SPACES
is powered by a growing coalition

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