

**GOING
DEEPER**
2023



**INNER
DEVELOPMENT
GOALS**



Is the Inner Development Goals Framework an oversimplification?

Inner development can be described as the lifelong, ongoing process of development of human cognitive, emotional and interpersonal capacities; expressed within relationship and ultimately orienting us towards service to the world. Understanding this vast and entangled domain is a complex task. For thousands of years, religion and philosophy, and later, psychology, have tried to describe and support inner development; and also to highlight its importance to our collective ability to live in harmony with each other and with the planet. The Inner Development Goals Framework does not pretend to capture the whole complexity and intricacy of inner growth and development. Nor does it claim to in any way represent the accumulated human wisdom and experience in this multifaceted field.

The Inner Development Goals (IDG) initiative is first and foremost a communications project. Its mission is to bring awareness of the importance of human inner development to more people and organisations. It also tries to make some of the rich existing knowledge about human cognitive and emotional development available in an accessible language that resonates widely with people and organizations in the 21st century.

The IDG project begins in the scientific perspective and is grounded in research and evidence. We deal in highly complex, intricate, and deep psychological and cultural processes that are not easy to capture in a simple framework. However we prioritise communicating scientific findings in a way that's easy to understand.

The simplification in structure and language necessary to achieve this approach inevitably comes with some loss of depth and complexity, which might be seen as overly reductionist. But this simplicity has been a conscious choice, a feature of the project and a contributor to its success. In order for people to value, prioritise or invest in inner development, the field itself must first become visible. To put inner development as a framework 'on the map' for a non-expert audience requires meeting people where they are, and explaining ourselves in a language that can be understood.

Could the IDG Framework reinforce unhelpful cultural norms?

The structure of the IDG Framework is intended to be simple to grasp, and intuitively understood by the modern mind. In some settings however such a communications device risks appearing like assessment criteria, and as such reinforcing late 20th-century cultural norms around 'competencies' and their development. In a society that overvalues progress and personal achievement, inner development thus presented could be seen as an accessory of performative self-improvement. We emphasise therefore that inner development is not about measurement or linear steps on a journey to perfection. It is a lifelong, messy process, characterised by setbacks and breakthroughs.

Accordingly, many of the skills featured in the IDG Framework are at odds with the dominant culture that prizes achievement and progress over all. For example, those skills in the 'being' domain such as 'inner compass', 'integrity and authenticity', and 'self-awareness' equip citizens to remain true to their deeper values where these contradict prevailing culture. Meanwhile 'relating' qualities such as 'connectedness', 'empathy and compassion', and 'humility' are themselves considered intrinsic values that inhibit extrinsic motivations such as wealth, achievement and status.

This said, it remains very difficult to develop such vital competencies for 21st century survival, so long as our cultures, systems and institutions remain dominated by 20th century ideas and mindsets. And so challenging and changing the modernist mindset of reductionism and technocratic manageability is an integral part of the IDG project.

Indeed, the challenges that humanity now faces are fundamentally irreducible and emergent - which is precisely why we so urgently need the transformative power of the IDGs. Inner development is critical in creating conditions for people to cope amid uncertainty and rapid change. Here for example, 'thinking' capacities like 'perspective taking', 'complexity awareness' and 'sensemaking' help leaders and citizens alike to hold greater nuance, tolerate ambiguity and navigate complexity.

Are the skills in the IDG Framework separate from each other, or are they an integrated whole?

A modernist cultural perception of 'separateness' and preference for clear delineation might lead us to imagine that inner capacities can be distinguished one from another, developed in isolation, and mastered one at a time. However, all IDG skills are aspects of whole people in unique cultural environments, and they are in constant motion and interplay. No skills or capacities in the IDG framework can successfully be developed in isolation.

At the same time as being inseparable from one another, all of the IDG skills are aspects of integrated human systems - individual or collective. They require certain enabling conditions - settings, lived experiences, ways of seeing - to arise. It is only in relationship and through action that inner qualities will be expressed and developed. Furthermore, inner development is a collective and cultural process that is almost always expressed in community.



Does the IDG Framework decontextualise inner development?

The IDG framework is not itself an intervention, a training programme, or a path of inner work. It's primarily a communications tool for raising the profile of inner development. In order for this comms device to function across many different cultures, countries and alongside different forms and approaches to inner development, it must necessarily be stripped back, universalised and somewhat abstract. We describe this as a 'naked' framework. It does not arise from any specific spiritual or cultural background (aside from emphasis on scientific method which is itself culturally informed). This relative neutrality is among the framework's greatest strengths; underpinning its bridging capacity between cultures and traditions.

In practice however, approaches to inner development must always operate within a cultural container. Inner capacities themselves don't meaningfully exist separate from the relational settings in which they're operating. Therefore IDG skills cannot be measured or assessed in the abstract. The idea of competence is furthermore a cultural construct and as such a function of relationship.

For the above reasons, the IDG framework should be seen a complement to, not a substitute for, culturally and historically embedded support for human development. As transformative capacities need an open, receptive and enabling culture to emerge, individual capacities and cultural support for those capacities must grow in parallel. Inner development is a collective and cultural process that is ultimately expressed in community in service of the greater good.

Further readings:

If you want to dive deeper into the complexity of human consciousness and consciousness development, you can consult some of the following sources:

Basseches, Michael (1984). *Dialectical Thinking and Adult Development*. Ablex Publishing Corporation.

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Kahneman, D. (2011) *Thinking Fast and Slow*. Farrer, Straus and Giroux

Kay, J. (2010) *Obliquity: Why our goals are best achieved indirectly*. Profile Books

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Vygotskij, Lev (1978). *Mind in Society: Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Harvard University Press.