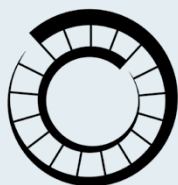


INNER DEVELOPMENT GOALS: FROM INNER GROWTH TO OUTER CHANGE

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INNER DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Transformational Skills for Sustainable Development

Inner Development Goals (IDG) is a non-profit and open-source initiative for inner development. We research, collect and communicate science-based skills and qualities that help us to live purposeful, sustainable, and productive lives. Supported by a growing community of practitioners, researchers, organisations and governments, IDG seeks to bridge the gap between personal growth and global transformation. In keeping with the spirit of IDG, this article is a testament to co-creation and collaboration, made possible by every member of our organisation, partners, and community.

In an era where attention to external factors and mechanistic solutions often take precedence, the concept of Inner Development Goals (IDG) emerges as an innovative approach for communicating the value of personal growth to collective sustainability and systemic change. Unlike conventional goals that focus solely on material gains, the IDGs delve into the realm of integrated development, encompassing emotional, psychological, social, and spiritual well-being to better equip us for the unprecedented challenges we face today.

Rooted in extensive interdisciplinary research, the premise is straightforward: without a foundational shift in human values, understanding, and leadership capacities, external solutions may prove to be too slow, inadequate or short-lived. Whilst the IDG Framework is itself innovative, the IDG organisation that co-created it has consistently adopted a creative approach to addressing some of the most pressing challenges of our time.

A CONTEXTUAL OVERVIEW

The dawn of the 21st century brought with it an acute realisation of the multifaceted challenges that the global community faces. Recognising the pressing need for a cohesive and comprehensive strategy, in 2015, the United Nations introduced Agenda 2030. Central to the agenda

lies an inclusive set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – targets for a future where everyone has an equitable opportunity and our planet's health is restored and preserved.

Having just passed the halfway point to the deadline, the unfortunate reality is that progress has so far been disappointing and is still far off track. Data released in the 2023 Sustainability Development Report shows that based on the current pace of progress, less than 20% of the SDG targets are on track to be achieved.¹ In fact, it indicates that we are further off-track than four years ago as a consequence of the ongoing pandemic, rising inflation and the cost-of-living crisis, planetary, environmental and economic distress, along with regional and national unrest, conflicts, and natural disasters.

While possessing the necessary resources and technology to achieve the goals, considering the SDGs solely as technical problems solvable through structural policy instruments or other external methods might be contributing to our lack of progress. The SDGs provide a tangible roadmap, but a crucial question arises: do humans currently possess the capacity to navigate this intricate and interconnected landscape of challenges?

Our evolutionary history, which has us primed for immediate threats and short-term decision-making, often falls short when confronted with long-term, abstract problems. The complexity of our modern environment and societal issues often outstrips our innate cognitive capacities, triggering our unconscious psychological barriers such as denial, rationalisation or discordance, among other 'dragons of inaction'.²

Addressing our global challenges necessitates a change in the underlying mindsets that originally caused them. It requires an innovative approach to identify, rectify and reshape the fundamental origins of these issues – human behaviour. Fortunately, modern research shows that the inner abilities we need to face and overcome these complex challenges can be developed. This was the starting point for the Inner Development Goals initiative.

¹ Sachs, J.D., Lafortune, G., Fuller, G., Drumm, E. (2023). *Sustainable Development Report 2023, Implementing the SDG Stimulus*. Paris: SDSN, Dublin: Dublin University Press, 2023. 10.25546/102924.

² Gifford, R. (2011). "The dragons of inaction: Psychological barriers that limit climate change mitigation", *American Psychologist*, 66, 290–302.





One of the Nordic retreat centres - Folkhögskola, 1890.

BOTTOM UP AND INSIDE OUT

Personal growth and development are by no means new concepts in humanity's history – ancient civilisations and religions have long recognised their importance. Whilst interpretations and practices differ across cultures and belief systems, personal growth, ethical conduct, and inner development have been cross-cultural and enduring aspects of human life for millennia. What has gone astray in our modern relationship to these fundamental concepts? Has the fast-paced nature of today's world impacted the time and importance allocated to self-reflection and inner development? And most importantly, in what ways can we reintegrate these principles to address contemporary challenges and enhance well-being and human flourishing?

Answers to these crucial questions begin to emerge from the broader history of personal growth movements and psychological approaches, such as humanistic, transpersonal and positive psychology, that have sought to investigate human well-being and inner development since the Industrial Revolution. A particularly illuminating perspective, and one that has been instrumental in shaping the IDG initiative, can be gleaned from the cultural, historical, and philosophical underpinnings

of Nordic societies – renowned for their unique approaches to governance, education and welfare.

In the book *"The Nordic Secret"* Lene Rachel Anderson and Tomas Björkman (a co-initiator of IDGs) describe in detail how the Nordic countries transitioned from poor, agricultural and authoritarian societies in the 1860s to wealthy, industrialised democracies just a few generations later. This remarkable transformation was achieved due to the facilitation of personal development in the state-sponsored – but not state-organised – retreat centres all over the Nordic countries.³

The retreat centres were located in nature, away from the complexity of rapid social change. Here, young adults could spend up to six months with the expressed goal of finding their inner compass and becoming active co-creators of the emerging new social order. At the turn of the 19th century, there were approximately 100 retreat centres like this in Denmark, 75 in Norway, and 150 in Sweden, with up to ten per cent of each generation of young adults participating in these programmes.

³ Tomas Björkman, Lene Rachel Anderson, *The Nordic Secret: A European Story of Beauty and Freedom*, Editor: Det Andersenske Forlag, 2020, ISBN 8792240763, 9788792240767.



The authors present a compelling argument for reevaluating traditional models of societal development and governance. Echoing the Nordic principles of self-awareness, community cohesion and sustainable growth, they call for a greater focus on human development, empathy, trust and cooperation as crucial elements for building sustainable and harmonious societies. They propose that in times of uncertainty and rapid change, the only way to build truly stable societies is to build them from the bottom up and from the inside out, with real change beginning in the mind – both collective and individual.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE IDGs

The inspiring insight behind the formation of the Nordic retreat centres was somewhat forgotten over the course of the 20th Century. Fortunately, in recent years, there has been a growing focus on the notion of inner transformation and related methodologies for societal change. This heightened interest is evident across various domains, such as sustainability science, education and policy-making, as demonstrated by the growing number of academic articles dedicated to the topics of inner development and sustainability progress.⁴ Reflected in the literature is the urgent need for more integrative approaches that link sustainability's inner and outer dimensions to facilitate transformation at various scales, including the individual, collective, and systemic levels.⁵

Between 2019 and 2020, a significant undertaking took place on Ekskåret Island within the Stockholm archipelago. During this period, a group of adult development scholars, which included prominent figures like Otto Scharmer, Amy Edmondson, Peter Senge, Jennifer Garvey Berger, and Robert Kegan, collaboratively authored and endorsed the "*Growth That Matters Manifesto*". The manifesto, serving as a call to action, highlighted the pressing need to work systemically with human growth in adults in order to better meet the accelerating complexity of societal challenges.

⁴ Ives, C.D., Schöpke, N., Woiwode, C. et al. IMAGINE sustainability: integrated inner-outer transformation in research, education and practice. *Sustainable Science* (2023).

⁵ Denton, F., K. Halsnæs, K. Akimoto, S. Burch, C. Diaz Morejon, F. Farias, J. Jupesta, A. Shareef, P. Schweizer-Ries, F. Teng, E. Zusman, 2022: Accelerating the transition in the context of sustainable development. In IPCC, 2022: *Climate Change 2022: Mitigation of Climate Change*. Contribution of Working Group III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [P.R. Shukla, J. Skea, R. Slade, A. Al Khouradji, R. van Diemen, D. McCollum, M. Pathak, S. Some, P. Vyas, R. Fradera, M. Belkacemi, A. Hasija, G. Lisboa, S. Luz, J. Malley, (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK and New York, NY, USA.

Amidst these developments, the Ekskåret Foundation, in collaboration with the 29k non-profit organisation and The New Division, led by founder Jakob Trollbäck, who notably led the design of the iconic SDG logos, engaged in concerted efforts to advance this innovative approach to confronting the world's "wicked issues". These initiators established connections with various stakeholders, including companies, researchers, and other interested parties aligned with the IDG project's vision. The aim was to synthesise a complex field of inner development into a simple framework that helps to name, understand, communicate and facilitate the 'inner' changes that are needed for an 'outer' change to occur.

A series of meetings were organised with founders, CEOs, HR managers, sustainability managers and influential figures in both the private and public sectors, as well as many discussions with researchers and leaders from prominent academic institutions. With collaboration, they succeeded in formulating a key survey question that could collect as much relevant input as possible on which skills and qualities are most important in order to work more effectively towards the SDGs.

SHAPING THE IDG FRAMEWORK

The IDG global survey activities, forming the basis of the IDG framework, involved three innovative phases. Phase 1 developed and distributed the survey in March 2021 to capture the varied insights from people with a professional relationship to sustainability issues. Participants were asked which "*abilities, qualities or skills are essential to develop, individually and collectively, to get us significantly closer to fulfilling the UN Sustainable Development Goals*". After analysis and several iterations, led by two independently working researchers, 23 skills were identified and, in order to have a more pedagogical framework, organised into 5 dimensions.

Phase 2, developing the IDG Toolkit, engaged over 3000 collaborators, including world-leading scientists, educators, organisations and government representatives. The IDG Toolkit is an evolving, open-source project that provides free and practical tools grounded in scientific research, helping individuals and collectives to develop each of the 23 skills.



To reduce any Western-centric bias and ensure the framework’s global applicability, Phase 3 of the research is currently in progress. The latest survey aims to reach over two million people and is anticipated to yield 100,000 responses from more than 100 different nations. The survey opens up the co-creation to more voices in a well-structured, inclusive and truly global dialogue that will shape the future of the IDG Framework and iterate the early draft of the IDG toolkit into a more user-friendly version.

UNVEILING THE IDG FRAMEWORK

The intended function of the IDG Framework is primarily pedagogical and is, first and foremost, a communications tool for the conceptualisation and cultivation of inner developmental capacities. The Framework uses purposefully simple language that is comprehensible and effective for practitioners to incorporate the IDGs into their respective governments, organisations, institutions or personal lives. The idea is that establishing this framework will draw interest, foster engagement, and spur further development with collaborative partners and institutions.

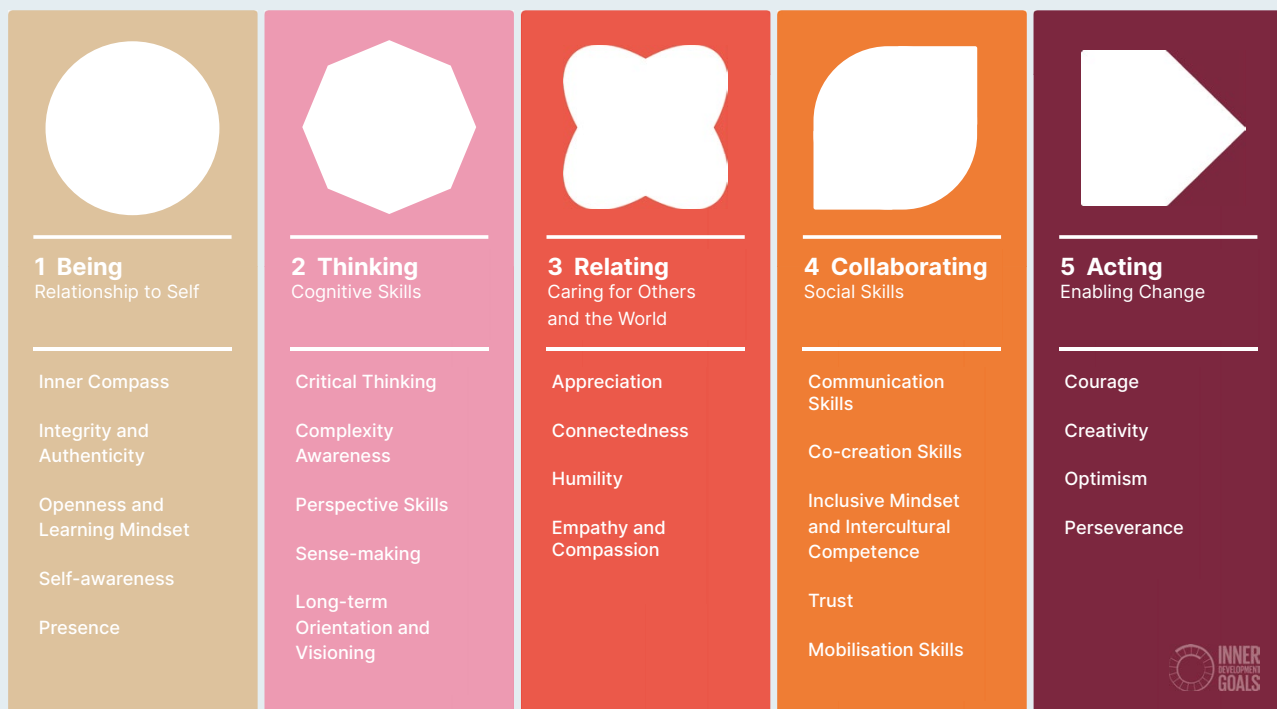
This innovative and collective endeavour aims to popularise and integrate these crucial skills into diverse aspects of individual and societal life. The Framework is a map that can assist us in navigating the landscape of our inner lives. It identifies areas of growth so that we can better handle complexities, deepen our connection to ourselves, others and the world, and fundamentally enhance our effectiveness as change agents and leaders, paving the way to a more sustainable future.

To provide a better understanding of each of the 5 dimensions, a small description accompanies each one, explaining their distinct attributes and significance:

Being: Cultivating our inner life and developing and deepening our relationship to our thoughts, feelings, and body help us be present, intentional and non-reactive when we face complexity.

Thinking: Developing our cognitive skills by taking different perspectives, evaluating information and making sense of the world as an interconnected whole is essential for wise decision-making.

Relating: Appreciating, caring for and feeling connected to others, such as neighbours, future



The IDG Framework covers 23 skills, organised into 5 dimensions.



generations or the biosphere, helps us create more just and sustainable systems and societies for everyone.

Collaborating: To make progress on shared concerns, we need to develop our abilities to include, hold space and communicate with stakeholders with different values, skills and competencies.

Acting: Qualities such as courage and optimism help us acquire true agency, break old patterns, generate original ideas and act with persistence in uncertain times.

ADDRESSING CRITICISMS AND EMBRACING ADAPTABILITY

When positioned alongside other frameworks, the unique focus of the IDGs becomes evident. While many developmental strategies, like the SDGs, provide an overarching view of global challenges, IDGs zero in on both the individual and collective role within these larger systems. It's not a replacement for broader frameworks but rather a complementary perspective, emphasising that macro-level change is inextricably linked to micro-level transformations.

A potential criticism that emerges is the interpretation of the term "inner" within the IDGs and its framework. There is a common misconception that "inner" solely pertains to individual introspection and personal qualities. Whilst it is true that the term implies individual personal growth and self-awareness, when applied to broader contexts, "inner" can also encompass the core values, principles, culture and ethos of collectives and organisations. This broader definition emphasises the importance of aligned group dynamics and the interconnection of personal and collective growth in driving systemic change.

A further criticism of the framework is the perceived subjectivity of the 23 skills. While frameworks like the SDGs provide quantifiable targets, the IDGs' emphasis on inner qualities and personal growth can be seen as less tangible. How does one measure self-awareness or empathy without depending on self-reports? Can such intangible goals be universally applied, given the diverse cultural and societal contexts across the globe?

Such questions continue to be addressed through discourse and research, but it is essential to recognise that the strength of the IDG Framework lies in its flexibility. While it offers a map for inner growth,

it does not prescribe a one-size-fits-all approach, nor does it represent a training curriculum in itself. Its simplicity is a design principle, both keeping it easy to communicate and relatively 'naked' or decontextualised, ready to be re-contextualised within specific training or personal development approaches. This adaptability allows it to be tailored to diverse cultural and societal contexts, ensuring its relevance across different settings. By recognising its limitations and continuously refining the framework in response to feedback, the IDGs can become an increasingly robust and globally transferable tool in the quest for a sustainable and equitable future.



IDG volunteers outside the 2022 Summit in Stockholm, Sweden.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

IDG works in four main areas: Communication, Movement Building, Policy Development and Research Co-creation, which are vital in disseminating



the message and strategies of IDG to a broader audience. The primary stakeholders working with IDG are companies, NGOs, governments and academic institutions because of their vast potential to facilitate collective learning and drive systemic change. Furthermore, whilst there are various domains where adult development matters, the workplace plays a central role by providing repeated chances to encounter diverse perspectives, tackle challenges, receive feedback and take on responsibility – areas for which the IDG framework becomes particularly valuable.

In pilot countries, such as Costa Rica, where ministers and parts of the public sector have formally adopted the IDG Framework, collaborative efforts with IDG Country Centres have been initiated to develop and strengthen leadership capacities across various sectors, ensuring a more integrated approach to sustainable development that includes both external and inner dimensions. Furthermore, multinational corporations like Google, Ikea, Ericsson, and Spotify are among the first collaborating partners to incorporate IDGs into their organisations and more intentionally work on the inner skills needed for sustainable change within the company. IDGs now has more than 50 global corporate and institutional partners and 500+ multiplying organisations.

When working with the primary stakeholders, the IDG Framework is used to help leaders perceive and develop a wide range of cognitive, emotional and relational capacities that will help them to take on challenges and better contribute to sustainable development within their respective organisations. Furthermore, the IDGs facilitate the systematic development and application of critical inner skills by offering leadership workshops and masterclasses, working closely with agents of change within organisations and governments, and providing regular events and an annual summit where participants can immerse themselves in transformative experiences, engage with experts, and collaborate on innovative solutions for personal growth and societal advancement.

At an individual and community level, IDG organises monthly online gatherings that act as the steady heartbeat of the global community; it empowers individuals around the globe to start their own IDG hubs (currently over 350) – connecting the community based on the shared understanding of

the IDG Framework, and finally, it provides an open-source online toolkit with more than 30 evidence-based approaches that individuals and teams can use to cultivate each of the 23 skills.

LOOKING FORWARD

The IDG initiative, having been established in 2020, is at its beginnings, yet its influence on the global landscape is already significant. As recognition and acceptance of the Framework spreads, the potential for further transformative impact is exponential. With the commitment of change agents, both in positions of influence and among everyday citizens, the IDGs are capable of catalysing positive shifts on personal, organisational, communal, and global levels.

The journey ahead is not without challenges, as the dynamic nature of global ecological issues necessitates continuous adaptation and innovation. By emphasising the symbiotic relationship between individual growth and societal progress, the IDGs offer a novel perspective on the path to ecological sustainability. The challenges we face as humanity are an invitation – an invitation to rethink, reimagine, and rebuild; to consider who we need to be in this next chapter of civilisation. The IDGs serve as a compass in this journey, pointing towards a future where individual transformation drives societal progress.

This is a call to action for researchers, policymakers, leaders and employees in all types of organisations, educators, independent practitioners, and readers alike to consider exploring and applying the IDGs within their professional and personal spheres. Inner development is not a supplementary activity to be pursued once all other tasks are completed, nor can external systemic changes wait until the inner work has been done. Both are mutually reinforcing and shouldn't be seen as competing demands. Furthermore, inner development is not a journey to be undertaken alone or as a one-off; rather, it is best understood as a continuous and collective process of inquiry, growth and learning through action in a supporting context. Only by cultivating our inner capacities can we hope to overcome the multitude of challenges before us, ensuring that our outer achievements are firmly rooted in inner wisdom, compassion and resilience.

