

A light gray wireframe map of the African continent is positioned in the upper left background of the slide.

Navigating Complex Change: What's Shifting and Why it Matters

TIM  Transforming Institutional
Models for Equity



| *Making change happen for social good.*



WELCOME

What this is

This is a sensemaking resource for people navigating deep, complex change across the nonprofit and social impact sector. It draws on what we're learning from the global development and humanitarian field - a sector currently experiencing acute disruption - and extrapolates those lessons to illuminate patterns, pressures, and possibilities relevant far beyond it.

Who it's for

Anyone asking: *What's happening right now - and how do we lead through it without defaulting to fear, fragmentation, or business as usual?*

It's especially useful for nonprofit and philanthropic leaders, boards, strategy teams, and partners grappling with tough decisions in rapidly changing conditions.



HOW TO USE IT

This isn't a roadmap. It's a lens to help you think, decide, and act more intentionally in a time of complexity.

By yourself

You don't need to read this start to finish. Skim it to get oriented, pause where something resonates, share with colleagues, and use the questions to connect the insights to your own situation.

With a group

Use this resource:

- As a shared framing for leadership or board discussions
- As a starting point for strategy resets or scenario planning
- As a common language across teams and partners

If this framing resonates and you would like assistance applying it to your specific context, contact us at client@humentum.org.

**Building what real
transformation takes – for
people, organizations, and
ecosystems.**

During this moment of disruption, TIME helps organizations and networks change *by design, not by default*.

As a transformation lab, we facilitate that change, helping people, organizations, and ecosystems build the capacity to adapt and thrive.

Our Approach

TIME acts as an enabling infrastructure for change. Our role is to:



FACILITATE SENSEMAKING AND FORESIGHT

- Nurture the networks of trust, knowledge, and solidarity that underpin lasting change.
- Help make sense of disruption and explore what is possible.
- Build alignment in direction, language, and values.



SUPPORT EXPERIMENTATION AND TRANSFORMATION IN REAL TIME

- Move from reflection to action.
- Foster a learning and doing mindset to demonstrate values-aligned shifts
- Support adaptive approaches to strategy, systems, and funding.



TURN LEARNING INTO TOOLS ANYONE CAN USE

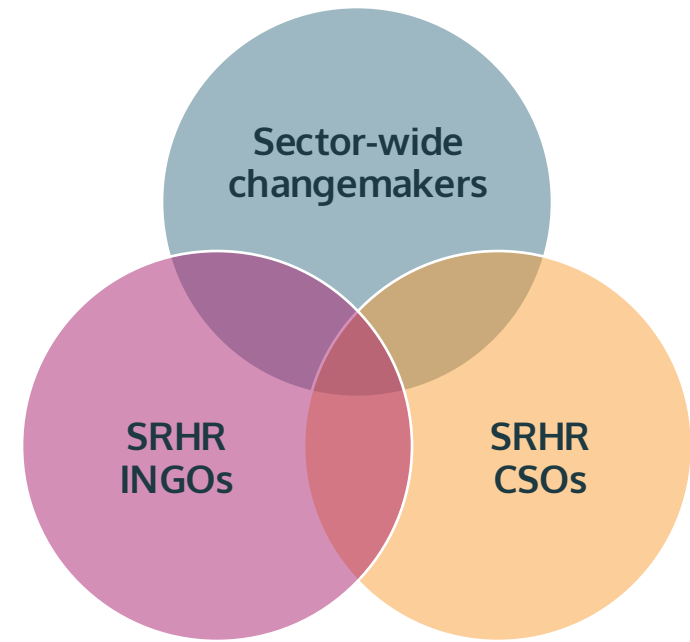
- Translate real-world learning into free, practical tools and resources.
- Share and apply what works across the ecosystem.

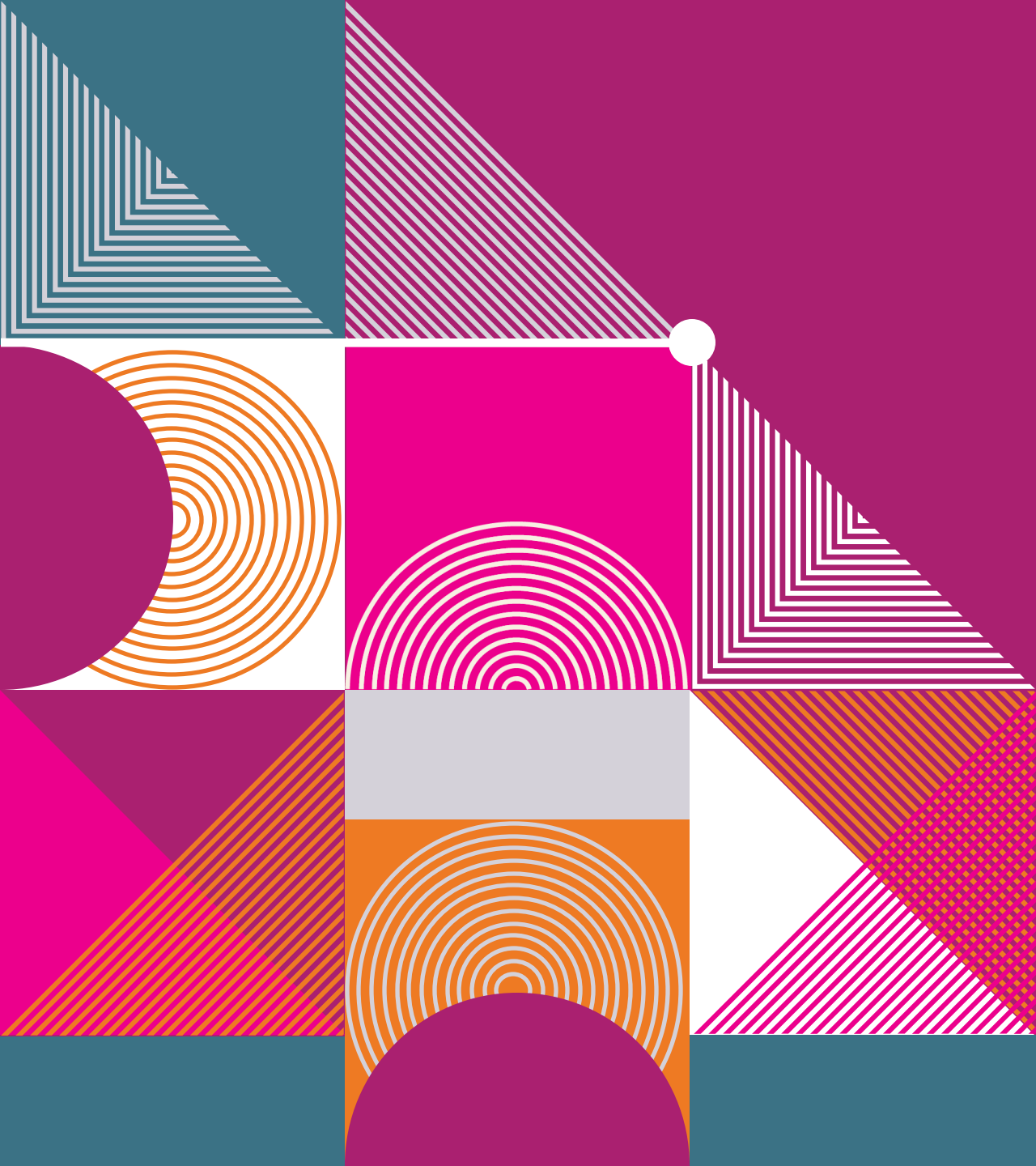
Make Sense. Take Action. Share Learning.

Core Learning Questions

TIME is a learning initiative exploring what sector-wide transformation really takes. Across our work with INGOs, CSOs, and system-wide changemakers, we're asking:

1. What is actually changing - and what's holding transformation back?
2. How does power shift in practice, not just in principle?
3. What values, relationships, and enabling conditions make change possible?
4. What new models, power dynamics, and ways of working are emerging across the ecosystem?
5. How can we turn reflection into coordinated action and sustained transformation?



An abstract geometric design on the left side of the slide. It features a grid of squares and triangles, each containing different patterns: concentric circles, parallel lines, and solid colors. The colors include teal, magenta, orange, and white. A small white circle is positioned at the intersection of the top and middle rows of the grid.

SENSEMAKING

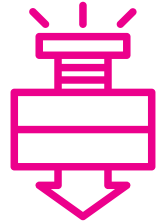
What is happening?

What does it feel like?

How do we make sense of it?

What's happening?

Organizations under pressure.

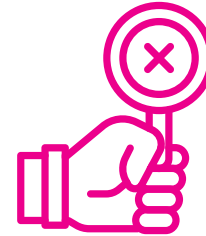


- **62%** of nonprofits have less than six months of reserves
- **54%** are considering restructuring or merging
- **33%** have already closed offices or are at risk of closure

Organizations in “*survival mode*”, struggling with funding insecurity, collapsing partnerships, and institutional fragility.

Talent drain — loss of skilled professionals and institutional knowledge.

A systems-level reckoning.



Escalating opposition, resistance to change, and coordinated attacks on rights and progress.

Dissolution of long-standing funding streams and withdrawal of donor support.

Deep **uncertainty, confusion, and complexity** in the operating environment.

A sector at a crossroads.



Fragmented responses and siloed struggles yet sparks of **innovation** and reimagining.

A space of transition — caught between collapsing dominant systems and emerging local-led models.

A fork in the road — toward regression or radical transformation.

What does it feel like?

Grief and Betrayal.



Grief, mourning, and betrayal — for what's being lost, how it's being lost, and who is being left behind.

Fear and uncertainty — not knowing what's next or who will remain standing.

Exhaustion and burnout — overwhelming workloads, high expectations, and no clear path forward.

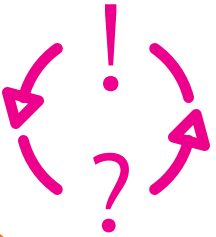
Urgent and Energizing.



Opportunity and urgency — to shift power, center local leadership, and build new models.

A rallying cry — for strategy, solidarity, and systems rooted in equity and care.

Both truths coexist – and shape how change is experienced.



Disorientation and discomfort — because even necessary change feels painful and unclear.

Contradictory emotions — discouragement and determination coexisting; pessimism alongside cautious optimism.



"We are letting go the best and brightest into a work desert."

"Feels like I was in a battlefield with all my compatriots, and I am watching them fall down; it is hard to watch them fall and hard to be the one still standing."

"This feels like COVID all over again – the pressure, the confusion, the burnout."

"It feels like the rug being pulled out from under us."

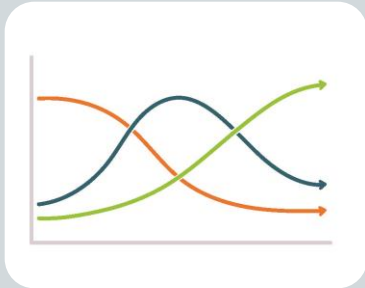
"Amidst all this change, our movement is also under attack. There is a shadow cast over all this work we are doing. So, while we are trying to re-envision the emergent system, we are having to defend our legitimacy as a movement through the fog of misinformation and disinformation."

"We are still in a 'power over' dynamic - donors and large INGOs deciding the terms. Moving toward 'power to' and 'power with' is essential for real transformation."

"We are being tugged backward at the same time as we are being tugged forward."

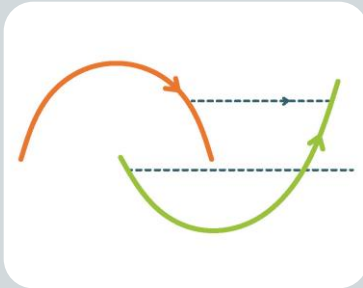
How do we make sense of it?

There is no single “map” for this moment. But there are multiple **lenses** that help us see the patterns and choices more clearly:



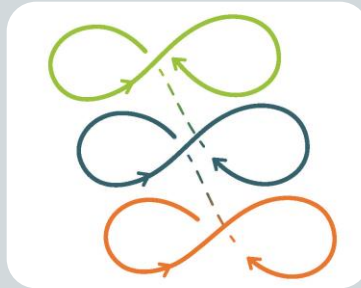
Three Horizons

Seeing today's reality, what's emerging, and what could be possible - simultaneously.



Two Loops

Understanding overlapping roles during paradigm transitions: stabilizers, hospice workers, trailblazers, midwives, bridge-builders.



Panarchy & Ecocycle

Recognizing interconnected cycles of change across levels and finding leverage points for regeneration.



Social Change Ecosystem Map

Naming diverse roles and interdependence: we don't each have to do it all; we need each other.

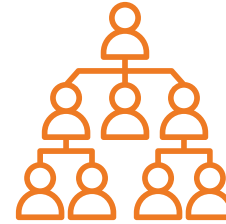
Turning insight into action

FOR YOURSELF



- What resonates most with me?
- How do I want to show up now?

FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION



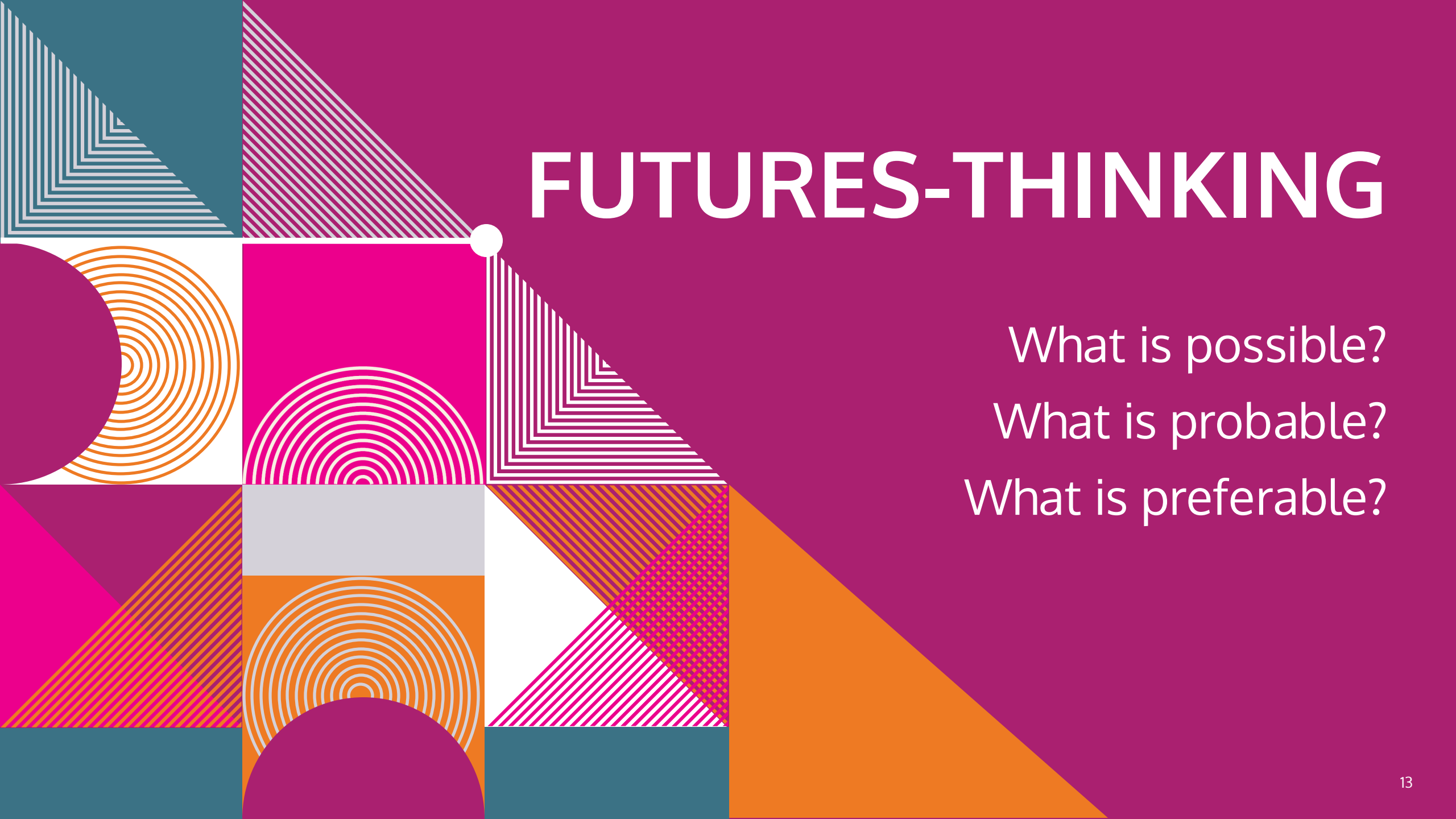
- Where are we holding onto structures that no longer serve us?
- How are we supporting our people to navigate uncertainty?
- Are we resourcing resilience or just survival?
- What kinds of leadership do we need to meet this moment?

FOR THE WIDER ECOSYSTEM



- What role do we want to play in shaping what comes next?
- How can we strengthen networks of trust and collaboration?

How can we regenerate the soil we are planted in?

The background is a vibrant magenta color. On the left side, there is a complex geometric design composed of several overlapping squares and triangles. These shapes are filled with various patterns: concentric circles in orange and white, concentric semi-circles in magenta and white, diagonal lines in white and magenta, and solid colors in teal, orange, and white. A small white circle is positioned at the intersection of the top-left and top-middle squares.

FUTURES-THINKING

What is possible?
What is probable?
What is preferable?

Futures Summary

"Fragmentation is the easy road - solidarity takes work and trust."

Promising PROBABILITIES

Sector Reform

- Modest shifts in funding models, leadership norms, and cross-sector collaboration

Government & Funding Systems

- Donor strategies begin referencing equity and justice
- Short-term priorities dominate
- Regional coalitions gain visibility but under-resourced

Organizational Models

- Staff adapt creatively despite cuts
- Core capacities sustained despite funding cuts

Narratives & Culture

- Early narrative shifts toward solidarity and decolonization
- Change still more symbolic than structural

Experimentation & Learning

- Innovation pockets show alternatives
- Learning treated as projects, not embedded practice

Technology / AI

- AI tools adopted for efficiency and awareness, with uneven use

Promising POSSIBILITIES

Sector Reform

- Power rebalances to local actors & coalitions
- INGOs transition into enablers, not implementers
- Cross-sector alliances link humanitarian, climate, justice movements

Government & Funding Systems

- Governments assume stronger ownership; donors shift to support roles
- Philanthropy aligns with community priorities
- South-South funds & collaboration expand

Organizational Models

- Distributed, flexible organizational models
- More resilient and diverse career pathways emerge

Narratives & Culture

- Civil society is seen as strategic, visionary, and essential

Experimentation & Learning

- Experimentation normalized as a principle, not a pilot
- Global networks accelerate cross-context learning

Technology / AI

- AI enhances policy insight and knowledge management
- Digital platforms broaden access and amplify excluded voices

← Probable

Possible →

Constraining or Harmful PROBABILITIES

Sector Reform

- System reorganizes without real transformation
- Civil society remains overstretched in survival mode
- Movements remain stuck in conversation mode

Government & Funding Systems

- Donors prioritize national interests over justice
- Volatile, short-term funding undermines long-term planning

Organizational Models

- Layoffs & precarious contracts intensify brain drain

Narratives & Culture

- Opposition is emboldened; trust in institutions erodes
- Tokenistic reform language without practice

Experimentation & Learning

- Pilots are extractive, used for donor optics
- Knowledge lost at project closeout

Technology / AI

- Safeguards lag as adoption accelerates
- Misinformation spreads through unregulated tools

Constraining or Harmful POSSIBILITIES

Sector Reform

- Decolonization reduced to buzzwords
- INGOs retrench, preserving HQ while hollowing out field presence
- Reform agendas fragment; incoherence grows

Government & Funding Systems

- Philanthropy dominates with fragmented, short-term flows
- Donor retreat accelerates
- South-South cooperation creates new power hierarchies

Organizational Models

- INGOs collapse/merge
- Local actors overloaded with compliance but underfunded

Narratives & Culture

- Rights retrogression accelerates
- Civic space contracts under surveillance & repression

Experimentation & Learning

- Extractive innovation for optics
- Risk aversion prevents bold alternatives

Technology / AI

- AI used for surveillance & compliance without consent
- Disinformation undermines trust & democratic processes
- Digital divide deepens, excluding Global South voices

Preferable Futures

"When we work together, we expand the pie - not just fight for the same slice."

1

Local leadership & agenda-setting:

Grassroots and regional coalitions drive decisions, shaping funding and solutions, and INGOs support local ecosystems rather than replace them.

2

Collaborative, ecosystem-oriented sector:

Shared values, deep listening, and partnerships are standard practice.

3

Continuous learning and adaptation:

Experimentation and reflection are core practices for organizations, enabling agility and responsiveness to change.

4

Redefined INGO roles:

INGOs act as infrastructure enablers, supporting and strengthening local ecosystems rather than replacing them.

5

Equity & narrative transformation:

Civil society is respected as strategic, visionary, and essential; decolonization and inclusion are substantive, not symbolic.

6

Strategic, responsible use of AI & tech:

Enhances efficiency, knowledge management, and insight without enabling surveillance or reinforcing inequities.

7

Long-term coordinated resources:

Philanthropy and donor strategies align with community-defined goals.

8

Resilient and connected systems:

Strong government ownership and cross-sector collaboration ensure systemic relevance and sustainability.

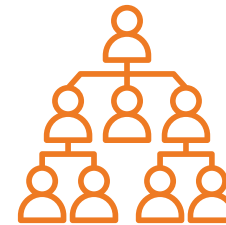
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- Where can I lead and influence?

FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION



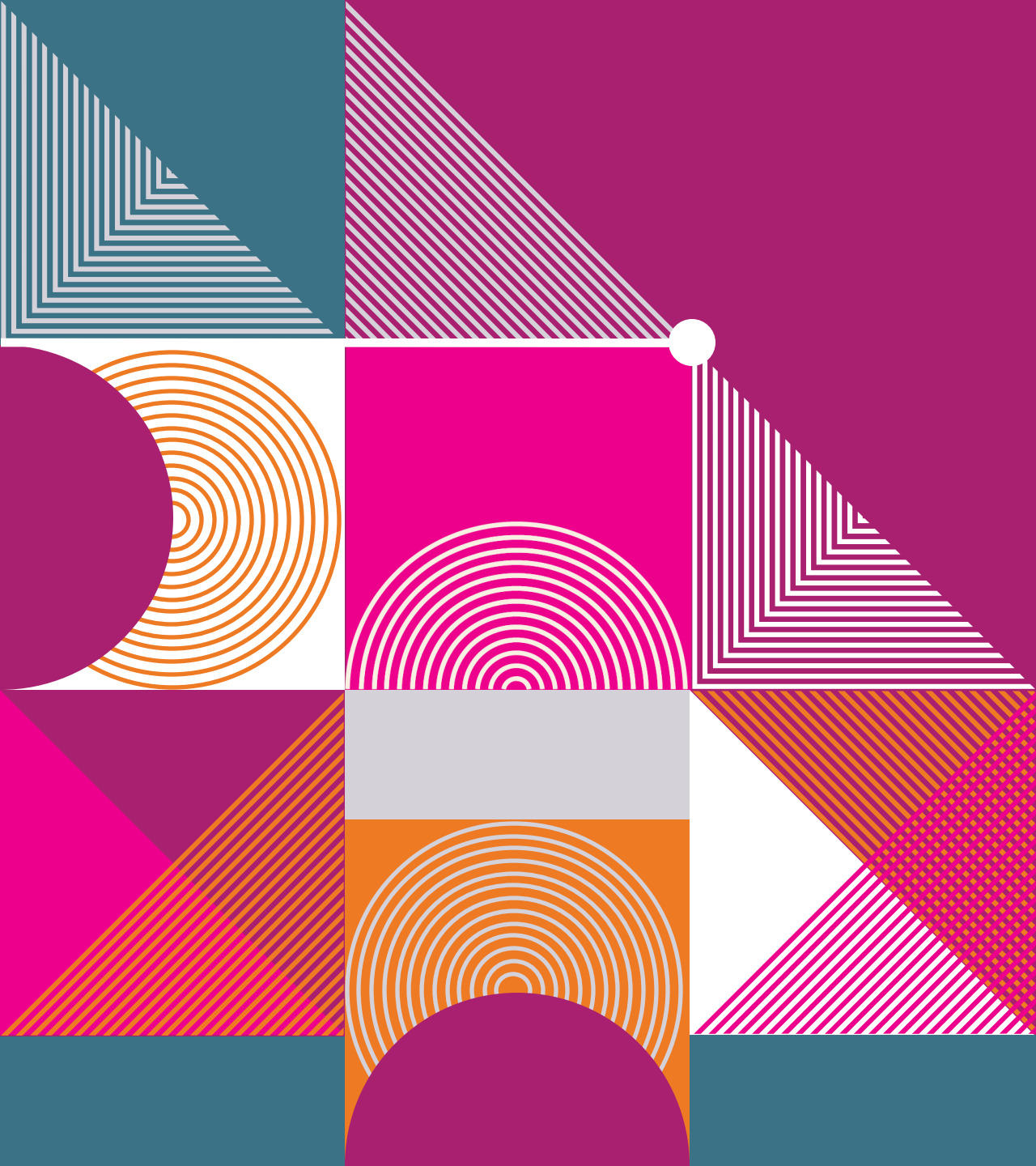
- Which strategies or mindsets will we need to thrive in future scenarios?
- How do we balance what is worth conserving with what must change?

FOR THE WIDER ECOSYSTEM



- Where are the leverage points for collective action?
- How do we ensure resources and power align with the futures we want to build?

What kind of futures are we rehearsing every day — and are they worthy of us?



LESSONS WE'RE CARRYING FORWARD

WHAT WE ARE LEARNING

DISRUPTION ≠ TRANSFORMATION

System collapse doesn't guarantee transformation - without intention, attention, and narrative power, we risk re-creating the same dynamics in new forms.

KNOW YOUR ROLE AND DO IT WELL

No one can do everything - and it's pointless to try. Transformation strengthens when each of us is self-aware, clear about the space we uniquely occupy, and respectful of the roles others play. Judgment fragments movements; role clarity strengthens them.

REGENERATE THE SOIL YOU ARE PLANTED IN

We change systems by tending to what is within reach - our organizations, partnerships, networks, and communities. If each of us regenerates the soil we are planted in, together we enrich the wider ecosystem so new, healthier paradigms can take root.

RIPPLES AND NETWORKS MATTER

No single project or entity can change a system. But when trust, shared values, and aligned direction ripple through networks, change multiplies. Small, connected actions create momentum that is more than the sum of its parts.

CLARITY > OVERWHELM

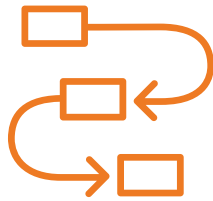
EMPOWERMENT > HELPLESSNESS

In a time of chaos and complexity, overwhelm and helplessness are easy defaults. What shifts the atmosphere is clarity of purpose and empowerment to act. Coming together to make sense of this moment and rehearsing the future we want - even in small steps - builds collective confidence and possibility.

LEADERSHIP IN THIS MOMENT REQUIRES COMFORT WITH DISCOMFORT

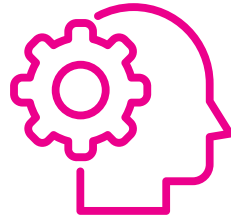
The skills that brought us here are not enough. Leading through systems-level change requires vulnerability, self-awareness, and the courage to learn and adapt in real time when the path forward is unclear.

Insights On How to Navigate Complex Change



THE PROCESS IS THE INTERVENTION

Change doesn't come from one program - it emerges when we create the conditions for trust, learning, and courageous experimentation.



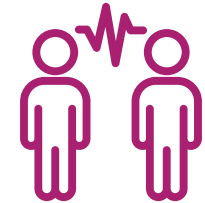
DEEP SENSEMAKING + PRACTICAL EXPERIMENTATION

People need both reflection and real-world testing; transformation happens when thinking and doing go hand-in-hand.



NAMING THE INVISIBLE

We can't transform what we won't name - power, fear, grief, care, and exclusion must be brought to the surface.



RELATIONAL WORK IS STRATEGIC WORK

Human connection is not a soft add-on - it's the infrastructure that makes transformation possible.



TIM Transforming Institutional Models for Equity

This resource is part of a broader set of tools for navigating complex change.

You can explore related deep dives at <https://humentum.org/advocacy/time/>.



| Making change happen for social good.