

COMPASSION AND THE SDGs

*An architecture for repositioning
compassion in the SDGs*





ASSESSING THE MIDPOINT

The year 2022 signals the midpoint in the timeline to achieve the United Nations General Assembly Sustainable Development Goals. Yet, **the further we progress with scientific advances and technological solutions, the farther away the SDG finish line** seems to move. A failure to connect physical systems with human systems reveals the inherent weaknesses in our siloed approaches to human and planetary health. Furthermore, the **COVID-19 pandemic shocked the systems** upon which each goal is dependent.

To avoid failure we need a **radical** and urgent **repositioning of values** and virtues as the drivers and custodians of the change required.

“
*If we realize
our ambitions
across the full
extent of the
Agenda, the
lives of all will
be profoundly
improved and
our world will
be
transformed
for the better.*”

A PARADIGM SHIFT

The complexity of achieving the ambitious SDG targets has forced us to divide and focus on our siloes of expertise. We have overlooked the importance of **human connection** and **relationships** in alleviating the suffering the SDGs were designed to overcome.

Compassion is a lens that can shift how we achieve the SDGs and the likelihood we will succeed. Our humanness and deep emotional connection to the suffering of others defines why and how we should act—*collectively* and *synergistically* across the 17 interconnected goals.

We need to **reactivate** the **human chain of compassion** that motivated the powerful vision to establish the SDGs, and **scale compassion** so it moves from being an individual activity to one that shapes **systems thinking**.

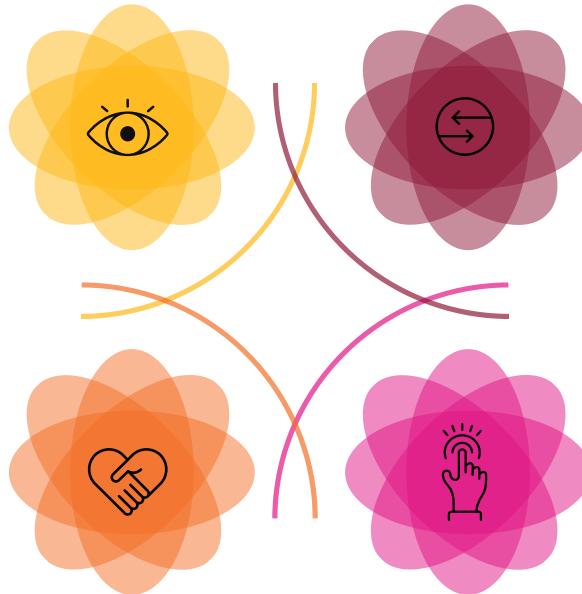
COMPASSION

[kuhm • pa • shn] *noun*

The 17 goals set out a vision for the world to alleviate and prevent future suffering. Paradoxically, the technical approaches and bureaucracies we built to achieve the SDGs dissociate us from the human connection that motivated us to establish them in the first place. This **4-part compassion process**[^] helps us re-center the human connection in our work.

01 NOTICING SUFFERING

An awareness of suffering of humans and our planet was the driving force in creating the SDGs. Each SDG describes and quantifies the suffering it intends to alleviate.



02 INTERPRETING SUFFERING

Realizing all humans experience suffering awakens a sense of togetherness. We must understand the drivers and consequences of suffering, as well as the pathways to alleviate it.

03 FEELING EMPATHY

Beyond facts and figures, the SDGs ask us to be present with and respond emotionally to other people's suffering.

04 TAKING ACTION

Taking action to alleviate suffering is the heart of compassion & the SDGs. Activating the conditions for flourishing requires "acting with."

[^]Worline, M. & Dutton, J. (2017). *Awakening Compassion at Work: The quiet power that elevates people and organizations.*

“When compassion lies at the heart of the structures and systems needed to deliver the SDGs, people are not only placed at the center, but their individual and collective ability to bring about change is realized.”

HOW COMPASSION GUIDES US TO ACHIEVE THE SDGs



NOTICING

Reveals the suffering experienced by those impacted by the world's challenges.

Re-centers people and communities at the heart of the goals, targets, and indicators.

01

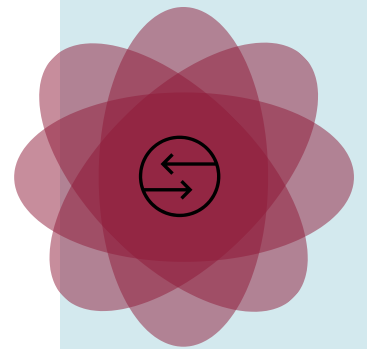
INTERPRETING

Compels us to regard the suffering of the planet and other human beings as our own suffering.

Underscores the importance of addressing equity, inclusion, and human rights to achieve all goals.

Facilitates an understanding of why the SDGs must be treated as an integrated collective.

Reveals where we have unintentionally contributed to current barriers/stagnation in achieving the goals.



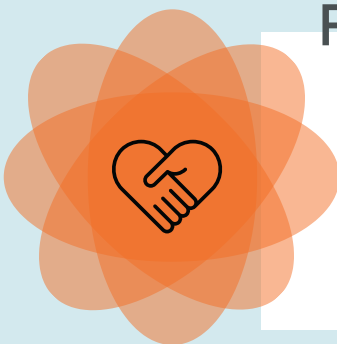
02

FEELING EMPATHY

Reconnects us with our humanness and facilitates emotional connectedness with each other.

Highlights the essential need for relationality to achieve the goals.

Motivates courageous conversations that embrace complexity and conflict to ensure solutions empower, endure, and provide dignity and security.



03

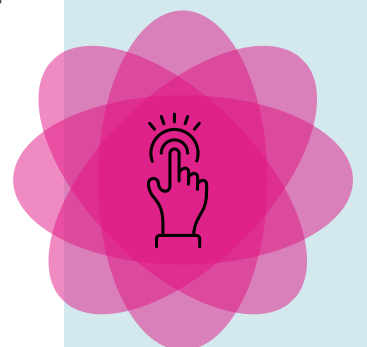
TAKING ACTION

Awakens a sense of shared destiny and compels us to act to ensure the outcome of that destiny.

Commits us to preventive action to avoid future suffering. Motivates us to challenge inaction.

Reveals the importance of horizontal co-creation with communities— not "doing to" or "doing for."

Overcomes siloed technocratic approaches to promote coordinated, collective action across goals.



04

THE INTERCONNECTED NATURE OF THE SDGs

“They are integrated and indivisible and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social, and environmental.”

TRANSFORMING OUR WORLD: THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Compassion allows us to comprehend the interconnected and mutually reinforcing nature of the SDGs.

The wholeness and wellness of the world depends on all 17 goals being **met concurrently**. We cannot reduce poverty without education, if healthcare is unavailable, or if food and water are inadequate. We cannot achieve inclusive and sustained economic growth without also achieving gender equality and peaceful societies.

The SDGs need to be treated as an **integrated collective**, rather than a set of separate, disparate goals. Compassion allows us to recognize our mutual suffering—our **common humanity**—and in doing so, enables us to draw a thread through our siloed technical spaces to connect all SDGs.

Compassion changes the focus of action—from doing *to* and *for* people, to actions *with*, *by*, and *as communities* empowered to collectively alleviate suffering. Through this, we can see the mutual benefit from **acting together** for humanity to flourish.

THE VALUE OF COMPASSION IS EXEMPLIFIED IN SDG17, *PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS*. WE MUST NURTURE AND SUSTAIN STRONG HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIPS. WE MUST MAKE SPACE TO FACILITATE COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS ABOUT BOTH SUFFERING AND FLOURISHING, AND EMBRACE—NOT AVOID—COMPLEXITY AND CONFLICT. SUCH A SOCIAL ARCHITECTURE IS THE ENGINE ROOM TO ACHIEVE ALL OTHER GOALS.

17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS





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