

# Me-We-World Foundation Paper 2026

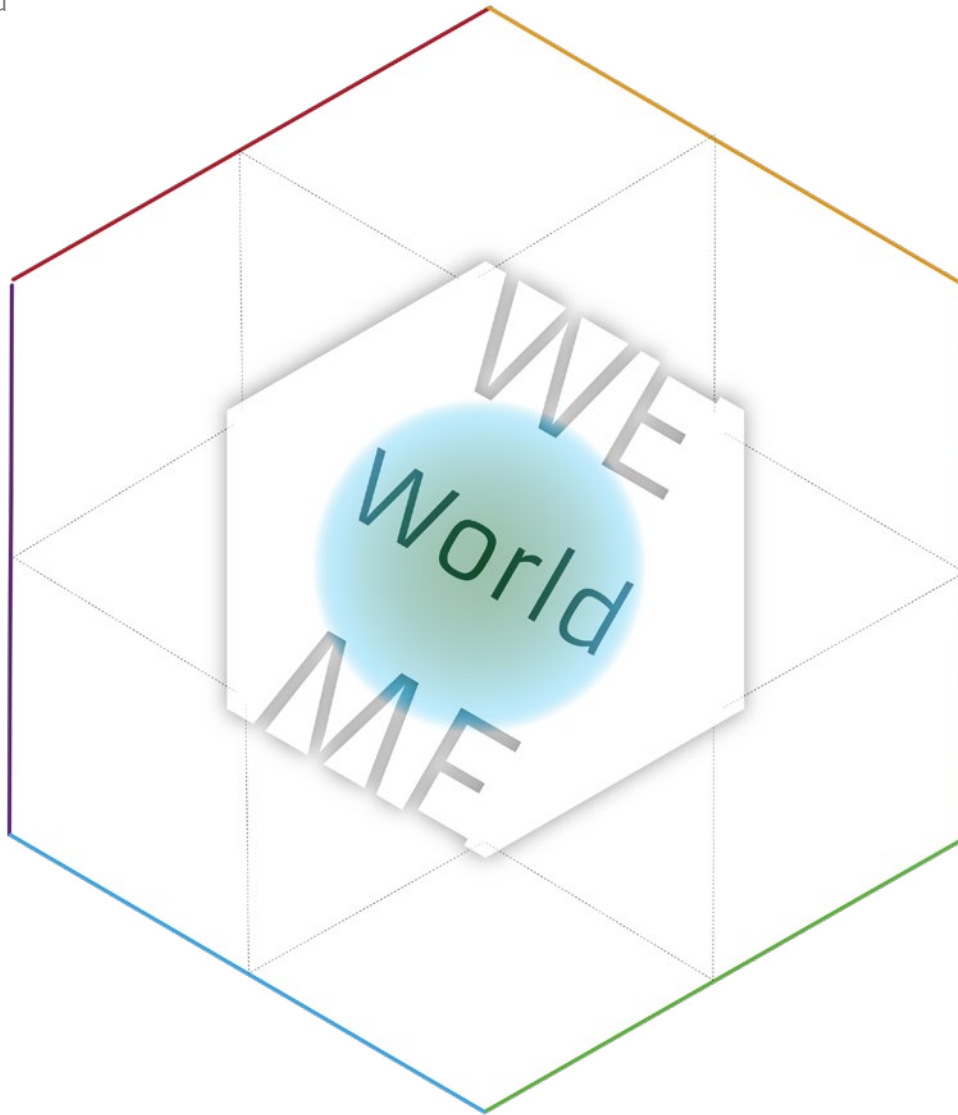
A Relational Framework for Navigating Complexity

Reading situations before intervening in them.

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# Executive Summary

Many of today's challenges cannot be understood through a single perspective alone.

Questions surrounding climate transition, governance, artificial intelligence, healthcare, housing, participation and social cohesion increasingly reveal a common characteristic: they are relational, interconnected and difficult to reduce to isolated problems.

While modern societies have developed sophisticated methods for analysis, planning and intervention, many complex situations continue to generate disagreement, uncertainty and unintended consequences. People often disagree not only about solutions, but about how a situation itself should be understood.

Me-We-World (MWW) emerged from the observation that meaningful intervention often requires a prior step: learning how to read a situation before attempting to change it.

This insight led to the development of **Relational Reading** — an emerging discipline concerned with how situations become meaningful through conditions, relationships, participation and interpretation.

Rather than beginning with intervention, Relational Reading begins with orientation.

The framework is built around several interconnected components:

- **Me-We-World** — a relational field that explores situations through the dimensions of personal experience, collective relationships and wider systemic conditions.
- **C-R-A** (Conditions, Relations and Actions) — a reading framework that helps reveal what is happening within a situation.
- **S-T-U-A-R-T** — six relational qualities (Safety, Trust, Understanding, Awareness, Relaxation and Togetherness) that help reveal how participation is being experienced.
- **The Double Lens** — a governance perspective that explores legitimacy through the complementary lenses of Law and Ethics.
- **Reading Before Leverage** — a shift from intervention-first thinking towards orientation-first thinking.
- **The Five Zones** — a relational interpretation of systems thinking inspired by Donella Meadows, helping practitioners orient themselves before identifying leverage opportunities.
- **The Navigation Ecology** — an interconnected collection of routes, lenses, matrices, readings, facilitation modes and practical tools that support navigation within complexity.

Together, these elements form a relational practice and navigation ecology designed to support more conscious participation in complex realities.

Me-We-World does not seek to replace systems thinking, governance, design, policy making or specialised expertise.

Its contribution is more modest and more fundamental.

It asks:

## How is this situation being understood?

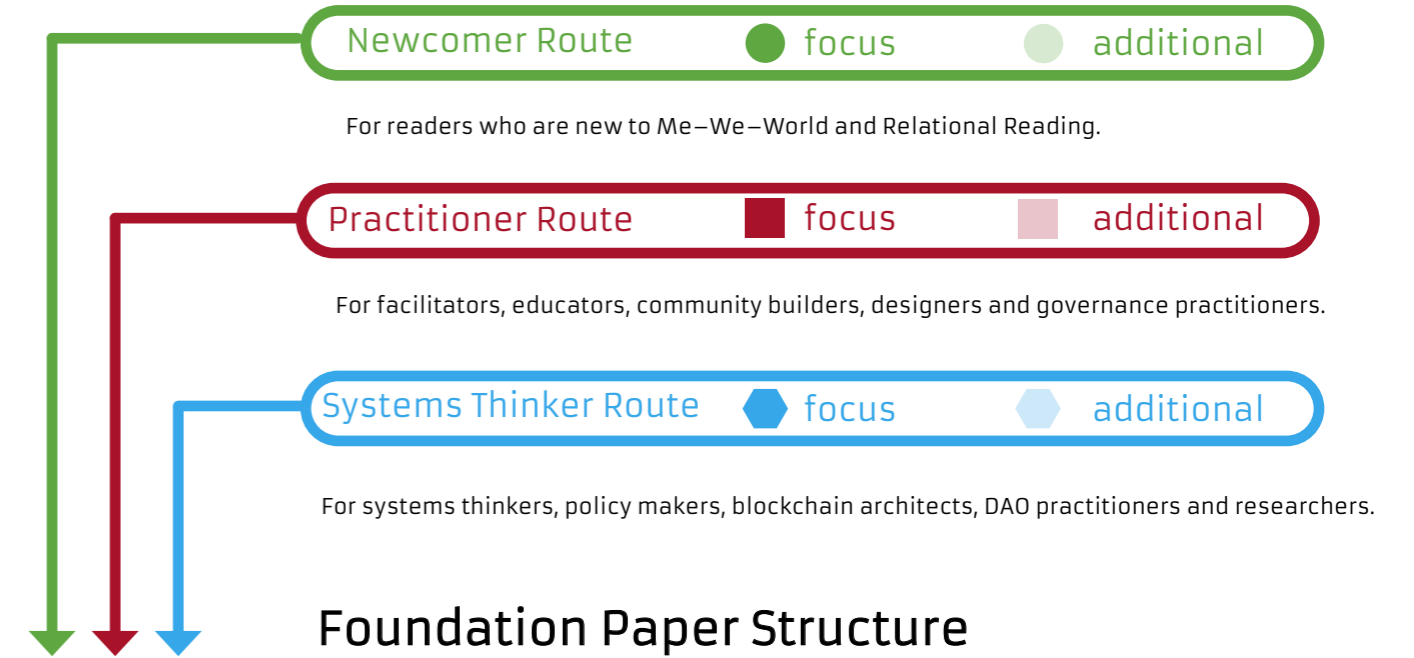
Because before deciding how a situation should change, it may first be necessary to understand how people are reading it.

Relational Reading, therefore, represents an invitation to cultivate greater awareness of conditions, relationships, meanings and perspectives before moving towards intervention.

In an age increasingly defined by complexity, the capacity to read may become just as important as the capacity to act.

## Three Entry Routes

This Foundation Paper can be read in different ways, depending on your background and interests. **The routes highlight areas of focus, while all chapters remain part of the wider conversation.**



|   |   |   |    |   |
|---|---|---|----|---|
| ● | □ | ◇ | 1  | Why MWW Exists<br>Why existing approaches often struggle with complexity.               |
| ● | □ | ◆ | 2  | The Challenge of Complex Realities<br>Why complexity demands new forms of navigation.   |
| ● | □ | ◆ | 3  | The Emergence of Relational Reading<br>How Relational Reading emerged through practice. |
| ● | ■ | ◆ | 4  | What Is Relational Reading?<br>The core proposition of the discipline.                  |
| ● | ■ | ◆ | 5  | The Relational Field<br>Me, We and World as relational dimensions.                      |
| ○ | ■ | ◆ | 6  | The C-R-A Matrix<br>Conditions, Relation and Action.                                    |
| ○ | ■ | ◆ | 7  | S-T-U-A-R-T<br>Reading relational qualities.  |
| ○ | ■ | ◆ | 8  | The Double Lens<br>Law and Ethics as complementary perspectives.                        |
| ○ | □ | ◆ | 9  | Reading Before Leverage<br>Why intervention begins with reading.                        |
| ○ | □ | ◇ | 10 | The Navigation Ecology<br>How frameworks, canvases, matrices and readings connect.      |
| ○ | □ | ◇ | 11 | The Five Zones<br>A relational interpretation of Meadows.                               |
| ○ | □ | ◇ | 12 | Towards a New Discipline<br>The future of Relational Reading.                           |



## Seeing More, Understanding Less

It is often said that we live in an age of unprecedented access to information.

We can measure more than ever before. We can connect across continents in seconds. We can model complex systems, predict patterns and generate knowledge at extraordinary speed. Yet despite this abundance of information, many people experience a growing sense of uncertainty.

Not because reality has become unknowable, but because the relationships between things have become increasingly difficult to see.

Questions of technology, governance, ecology, economics and culture are often discussed separately. In practice, however, they continuously shape one another.

Decisions made in one domain create consequences in another. Actions that appear beneficial from one perspective may generate tension elsewhere.

The more interconnected our world becomes, the harder it becomes to understand it through a single lens.

## The Limits of Specialisation

Modern societies have achieved remarkable things through specialisation.

Scientists, engineers, policymakers, educators, entrepreneurs and designers each contribute forms of knowledge that would be impossible for any individual to develop alone.

Yet specialisation comes with a consequence. As knowledge becomes more precise, it also becomes more fragmented.

Experts learn to see deeper into particular domains, while the relationships between domains often remain less visible.

This does not mean that expertise is the

problem. Rather, it suggests that expertise alone may no longer be sufficient.

## Living With Partial Perspectives.

Every perspective conceals something.

This is not a failure of perception. It is a condition of being human.

No individual, organisation or institution is capable of seeing the whole of a situation.

We participate from positions.

Our experiences, responsibilities, histories and relationships shape what becomes visible to us and what remains in the background.

The challenge is therefore not to discover a final or objective viewpoint from which everything can be understood.

The challenge is learning how to navigate situations in which multiple partial perspectives coexist.

## A Different Question

Most approaches to change begin with intervention. The underlying assumption is understandable. When a situation becomes problematic, attention naturally shifts towards solutions, improvements, reforms or innovations. Yet complex situations often reveal a different challenge. People may disagree about what should be done because they are not reading the situation in the same way. What appears obvious from one position may be invisible from another. What appears rational within one institutional context may feel harmful within another. Before disagreements emerge around action, they often emerge around interpretation. For this reason, Me-We-World starts from a different question >>

Not:

What should we do?

But:

How is this situation being understood?

Only when the conditions shaping perception become more visible can action become more conscious.

## Between Certainty & Participation

Modern institutions often operate as if better information will eventually produce better decisions.

In many situations this assumption remains useful. More knowledge can improve understanding, reduce uncertainty and support coordination.

Complex situations, however, introduce a different challenge.

The issue is not always the absence of information. More often, people are confronted with an abundance of information, interpreted through different experiences, responsibilities and worldviews. The question then becomes less about determining who possesses the correct perspective and more about understanding how different perspectives emerge in the first place. This does not imply that all perspectives are equally valid, nor does it suggest that judgement should be suspended indefinitely.

At some point decisions must be made.

Resources must be allocated.

Responsibilities must be accepted.

Participation requires position-taking.

Yet every position remains partial. Every decision is taken from within a particular context, at a particular moment, based on the information available at that time.

Relational Reading begins by recognising this condition rather than attempting to overcome it.

## Why Me-We-World Exists

Over time, a recurring observation emerged across community projects, governance dialogues, systems innovation initiatives and educational settings.

Again and again, people found themselves discussing solutions while interpreting the situation itself in fundamentally different ways. Conflicts that appeared to concern policy often turned out to involve questions of trust.

Disagreements about implementation frequently reflected different understandings of responsibility. Technical discussions revealed underlying tensions around legitimacy, participation or identity.

What appeared at first to be a problem of coordination often proved to be a problem of orientation.

Over time, this observation began to appear across an increasingly wide range of contexts.

Community initiatives.

Governance challenges.

Technological transitions.

Ecological dilemmas.

Institutional reform.

Artificial intelligence.

Although these situations appeared different on the surface, they often revealed a similar underlying pattern.

People disagreed not only about solutions.

They disagreed about what they were seeing.

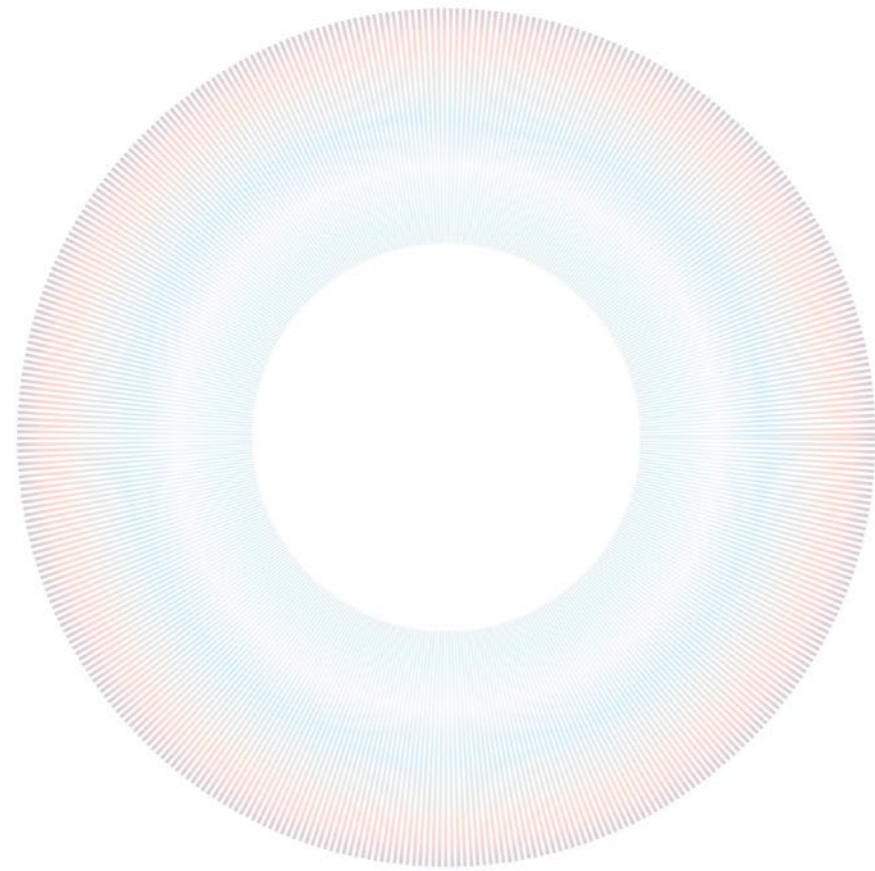
The challenge was no longer simply one of knowledge, participation or coordination.

It became a challenge of orientation within complexity itself.

Me-We-World emerged from the recognition that before intervention becomes meaningful, situations must first become readable.

This observation gradually led to a different way of looking at complexity.

Rather than beginning with intervention, Me-We-World began exploring what >>



>> what happens when greater attention is given to the conditions, relationships and assumptions through which situations become meaningful. The result was not another intervention framework. It was the beginning of an inquiry into Relational Reading.

### Closing Reflection

The purpose of Me–We–World is not to eliminate uncertainty.

Nor is it to replace expertise, governance or decision-making.

Its purpose is to support more conscious participation in situations that can never be fully known, fully controlled or fully resolved.

Rather than asking how complexity can be removed, Me–We–World asks how complexity might be navigated more responsibly.

This question forms the starting point for the chapters that follow.

Life



### Beyond Isolated Problems

Many of the challenges we encounter today resist simple definitions.

Climate change is not only an environmental issue.

Artificial intelligence is not only a technological issue.

Housing is not only an economic issue.

Healthcare is not only a medical issue.

Energy transitions are not only infrastructure projects.

Each of these examples simultaneously involves institutions, technologies, values, governance structures, economic realities, human behaviour and lived experience. Attempts to isolate one aspect often reveal its dependence on many others. What initially appears to be a technical problem may gradually reveal itself as a social challenge. What appears to be a governance issue may expose deeper questions of trust, identity or legitimacy. The boundaries between issues become increasingly difficult to maintain.

### The Return of Interdependence

For much of the modern era, progress has been closely associated with specialisation.

Breaking complex problems into manageable parts has enabled extraordinary achievements in science, engineering, medicine and governance.

Yet many contemporary challenges seem to operate differently. The behaviour of a complex situation cannot always be understood by analysing its individual components separately.

Relationships matter.

Context matters.

Timing matters.

Meaning matters.

Interdependence repeatedly reappears where simplification attempts to remove it. The challenge is not that reduction is wrong. The challenge is that reduction alone often becomes insufficient.

### The Metacrisis

The growing complexity of contemporary life is often described through separate crises.

Climate disruption.

Institutional distrust.

Political polarisation.

Technological acceleration.

Economic insecurity.

Artificial intelligence.

Yet many observers increasingly suggest that these developments cannot be understood in isolation.

They interact.

Solutions introduced in one domain frequently create consequences in another.

Attempts to optimise individual systems often generate new vulnerabilities elsewhere.

For this reason, some thinkers have begun referring to a broader metacrisis.

Not a single crisis.

But a condition in which multiple crises reinforce one another through increasingly interconnected relationships.

From a relational perspective, the challenge is not simply solving individual problems.

It is learning how to navigate situations in which causes, consequences, and responsibilities continuously interact across scales.

### When Different Realities Meet

One of the more difficult aspects of complexity is that people can participate in the same situation while experiencing fundamentally different realities.

A policymaker may see a necessary transition.

A resident may experience uncertainty.

An engineer may focus on technical feasibility.

A community leader may focus on social cohesion.

None of these perspectives are necessarily incorrect. Each emerges from a different position within the situation itself. This creates a challenge that is not merely technical. It becomes relational. The question is no longer:

Which perspective is correct?

but increasingly:

How do these different perspectives relate to one another?

Without this shift, dialogue often becomes a competition between realities rather than an exploration of them.

### The Limits of Control

Many modern institutions were developed during a period in which the world appeared more stable, more predictable and more separable than it does today.

Problems could often be isolated.

Responsibilities could be assigned.

Processes could be standardised.

Outcomes could be measured.

These approaches remain valuable and continue to play an important role in organising society.

Yet many contemporary challenges reveal >>

limits to what can be achieved through control alone.

The more interconnected a situation becomes, the harder it becomes to predict how interventions will unfold.

Actions generate unintended consequences.

Solutions create new tensions.

Optimisation in one area may produce vulnerabilities elsewhere.

The issue is not that control has become obsolete.

The issue is that control alone no longer provides sufficient orientation.

### The Risk of Reduction

Faced with uncertainty, there is a natural tendency to seek clarity.

Metrics provide clarity.

Rules provide clarity.

Targets provide clarity.

Models provide clarity.

These instruments play an important role in organising collective action.

At the same time, every model simplifies.

Every metric highlights certain aspects while leaving others in the background.

Every rule privileges particular forms of behaviour while discouraging others.

Problems emerge when these simplifications are mistaken for the reality they are intended to describe.

Human beings become resources.

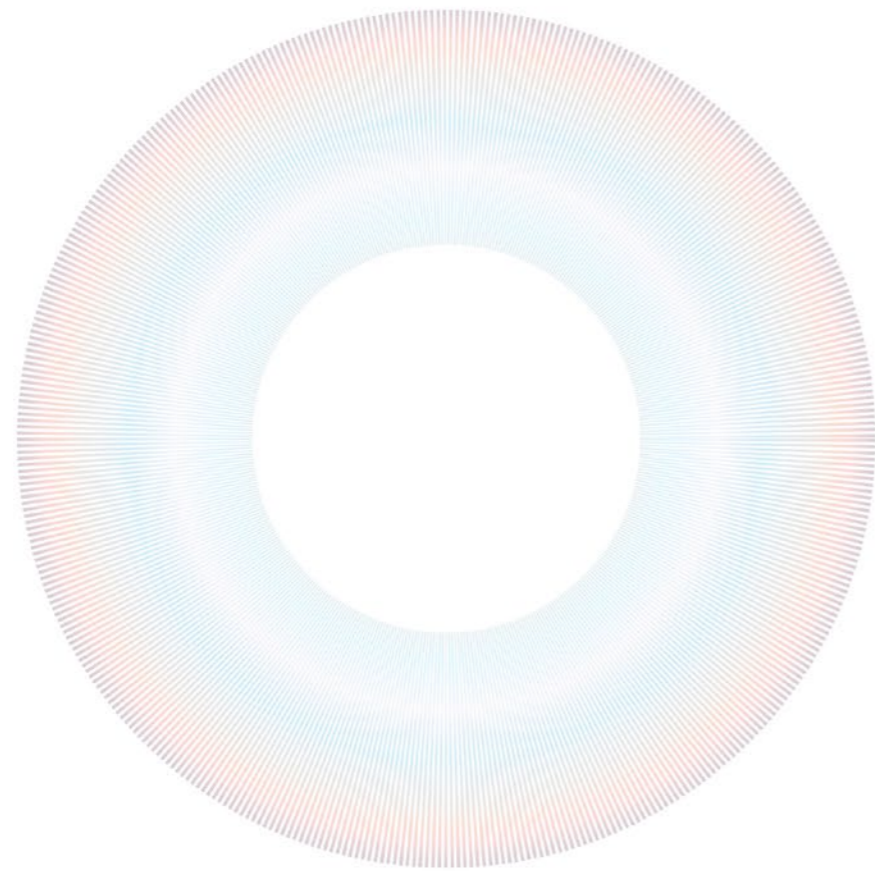
Communities become stakeholder groups.

Participation becomes compliance.

The map gradually replaces the territory.

The issue is rarely bad intentions.

More often it is a gradual narrowing of attention. >>



## >> Towards Relational Reading

Over time, these questions began to appear across very different contexts.

Community initiatives.

Governance dialogues.

Organisational change processes.

Technology projects.

Educational environments.

Although the topics differed, a similar pattern repeatedly emerged.

People often moved quickly towards solutions while carrying very different assumptions about the situation itself.

What appeared to be disagreement about action frequently revealed deeper differences in interpretation.

This observation gradually led to a different line of inquiry.

Rather than beginning with intervention, what would happen if greater attention were given to the way situations are perceived, interpreted and understood before decisions are made?

The exploration of this question became the starting point for Relational Reading.

The next chapter describes how this inquiry emerged through practice and why it eventually became the foundation of the Me–We–World framework.

Life



#### A Pattern That Kept Returning

The idea of Relational Reading did not emerge from a single theory, methodology or research project.

It emerged gradually.

Across different contexts, involving different people, different questions and different forms of practice, a similar pattern kept returning.

Conversations about solutions often concealed deeper differences in interpretation.

Disagreements that appeared to concern policy frequently revealed questions of trust.

Technical discussions exposed underlying tensions around responsibility, legitimacy or participation.

What initially appeared to be a problem of coordination often turned out to be a problem of orientation.

Again and again, attention was drawn to the same question:

What are people actually responding to?

#### From Community Building to Systemic Questions

Many of the early experiences that informed Me–We–World emerged in community-based settings.

Neighbours, volunteers, citizens, professionals and organisations were invited to work together around shared concerns.

The assumption was often straightforward.

If people could come together, exchange information and identify common interests, collective action would naturally follow.

Sometimes this happened.

Often it did not.

People who appeared to agree on an issue nevertheless struggled to move forward. >>

Conversations became repetitive.

Frustrations accumulated.

Solutions generated new disagreements.

Over time it became clear that information alone was rarely the limiting factor.

What mattered just as much were the conditions under which people interpreted information, the relationships through which meaning was created and the assumptions that remained unspoken.

#### The Me–We Question

This observation eventually gave rise to a recurring inquiry.

How do individual experiences relate to collective realities?

And how do both relate to the wider systems within which they are embedded?

The distinction between Me, We and World emerged as a practical way of exploring these questions.

Not as separate levels.

Not as categories.

But as relational dimensions that continuously influence one another.

A personal concern may reflect a collective pattern.

A collective pattern may be shaped by institutional conditions.

Institutional conditions may in turn influence personal experience.

What appeared separate often proved deeply interconnected.

#### Encounters With Systems Thinking

As the work evolved, systems thinking became an increasingly important influence. >>

>>The writings of Donella Meadows and many others offered valuable insights into feedback loops, structures, incentives and leverage points.

These perspectives helped explain why certain patterns persisted even when people were motivated to change them.

At the same time, a new question emerged.

Systems thinking often asks:

Where can a system be influenced most effectively?

This is an important question.

Yet practical experience suggested that another question frequently preceded it.

Before deciding where to intervene, people often struggled to understand what they were actually looking at.

The challenge was not only intervention.

The challenge was interpretation.

#### Reading Before Leverage

This insight became increasingly visible in projects involving governance, participation, community development, technology and systemic change.

Discussions about incentives revealed deeper questions about intention.

Conversations about accountability exposed tensions around trust.

Efforts to improve coordination highlighted differences in meaning and lived experience.

Again and again, leverage points appeared to depend upon something that had not yet been sufficiently explored:

the way a situation was being read.

Gradually a simple principle emerged:

Before asking where to intervene, it may be necessary to understand what is being affected.

This shift did not replace systems thinking.

It complemented it. >>

Reading became a necessary step before leverage.

#### Towards Relational Reading

Over time, these observations began to converge.

Questions of participation, governance, systems change, community building, ethics and human experience appeared less separate than they initially seemed.

What connected them was not a particular solution.

It was a shared need for orientation.

Relational Reading emerged as an attempt to address this need.

Not as a method for producing consensus.

Not as a tool for eliminating uncertainty.

But as a practice of exploring how situations become meaningful before decisions are made about how they should change.

The chapters that follow describe the conceptual foundations that gradually emerged from this inquiry.

The emergence of Relational Reading was not the result of a single project or methodology.

It developed gradually through years of practice across community development, governance dialogues, systems innovation, educational environments and collaborative design processes.<<

\* Several of these experiences have been documented separately and remain available as companion publications for readers interested in the practical origins of the discipline.

## 4. What Is Relational Reading? ● ■ ◆



### Reading Before Acting

Most contemporary approaches to change begin with action.

The focus may differ—strategy, innovation, governance, participation, systems change or design—but the underlying question often remains similar:

What should be done?

Relational Reading begins elsewhere.

It starts from the observation that before people disagree about solutions, they often disagree about the situation itself.

They may use the same words while referring to different realities.

They may support the same objective while interpreting the challenge in fundamentally different ways.

They may participate in the same process while experiencing it through entirely different conditions.

Before action comes interpretation.

Before intervention comes orientation.

### More Than Observation

At first glance, Relational Reading may appear similar to observation, analysis or sensemaking.

It shares characteristics with all three.

Yet it is not identical to any of them.

Observation often focuses on what can be seen.

Analysis seeks to explain.

Sensemaking attempts to create coherence.

Relational Reading is concerned with something slightly different.

It asks how a situation becomes meaningful in the first place. >>

What conditions shape perception?

Which relationships influence interpretation?

What assumptions remain unnoticed?

What appears obvious to one participant while remaining invisible to another?

These questions shift attention from events themselves to the relational processes through which events are understood.

### Situations Are Not Self-Explanatory

Complex situations do not arrive with fixed meanings attached to them.

Meaning emerges through interaction.

People interpret situations through experience, responsibility, culture, education, institutional roles, personal history and countless other influences.

As a result, different participants may be responding to very different realities while believing they are discussing the same issue.

Relational Reading does not attempt to eliminate these differences.

It seeks to make them visible.

The aim is not agreement.

The aim is greater awareness of how understanding itself is formed.

### Between Relativism and Certainty

The recognition that perspectives differ can easily lead in two directions.

One response is to search for certainty.

To determine which interpretation is correct and which should be dismissed.

Another response is to conclude that every interpretation is equally valid and that no meaningful judgement can be made. >>

>> Relational Reading follows neither path.

It begins from the assumption that every perspective is partial.

This does not make all perspectives equivalent.

Nor does it remove the need for responsibility.

People still make decisions.

Institutions still establish rules.

Communities still negotiate priorities.

The challenge is not to avoid judgement, but to recognise the conditions under which judgement takes place.

### Reading as Participation

A common image of understanding suggests that we first observe reality and then form an opinion about it.

Relational Reading proposes something different.

We are never entirely outside the situations we seek to understand.

We participate in them.

Through our roles, histories, interests, responsibilities and relationships, we influence the situations we observe while simultaneously being influenced by them.

Reading therefore becomes a participatory act. The reader is never entirely separate from what is being read.

This applies equally to individuals, organisations, communities and institutions.

### Difference Receptivity

Difference does not automatically become meaningful.

People encounter differences constantly.

Different experiences.

Different interests.

Different interpretations.

Different forms of knowledge.

Yet many of these differences never influence action.

They are ignored, dismissed or translated >>

>> into existing assumptions.

Relational Reading, therefore, depends upon a deeper capacity:

Difference Receptivity.

The capacity to notice, receive and explore meaningful differences without immediately reducing them to existing interpretations.

Difference Receptivity does not require agreement.

Nor does it imply neutrality.

It simply creates the possibility that a difference may matter before deciding what it means.

In this sense, Difference Receptivity forms the bridge between observation and intervention. Without it, leverage points remain invisible or are interpreted through existing assumptions. With it, new possibilities for navigation become available.

### A Discipline of Orientation

Relational Reading is not a method for producing consensus.

Nor is it a technique for eliminating uncertainty.

Its purpose is more modest, and perhaps more demanding.

It seeks to cultivate the capacity to remain attentive to relationships, conditions and meanings before moving too quickly towards intervention. In this sense, Relational Reading can be understood as a discipline of orientation.

A practice of becoming more conscious of how situations are interpreted, positioned and navigated.

The chapters that follow introduce the conceptual foundations that support this practice.

Beginning with the relational field itself:

**Me, We and World.** <<



### Beyond Individuals and Systems

Many approaches to complexity distinguish between individuals, groups and systems. While these distinctions can be useful, they can also create the impression that reality consists of separate layers that can be studied independently. Experience suggests otherwise. Personal concerns often reflect collective dynamics. Collective dynamics are influenced by institutional conditions. Institutional conditions shape personal experience. What appears separate is frequently intertwined. For this reason, Me–We–World does not begin by dividing reality into categories. Instead, it invites us to explore different dimensions of participation that are present within every situation.

### Three Dimensions of Participation

The terms Me, We and World do not describe separate entities. They describe three interconnected dimensions through which situations can be experienced, interpreted and navigated. Every situation contains all three. Every participant moves between them. And every intervention affects them simultaneously. The distinction is therefore not intended to separate reality, but to help reveal relationships that might otherwise remain unnoticed. >>

### Me

The Me dimension concerns lived experience. It includes questions of perception, identity, responsibility, motivation, memory and personal meaning. People do not encounter situations as neutral observers. They participate from particular positions shaped by experience and circumstance. The Me dimension draws attention to how situations are experienced from within.

It asks:

- What is being experienced?
- What concerns are present?
- What responsibilities are felt?
- What remains unspoken?

The purpose is not to individualise complex issues, but to recognise that every collective process is ultimately experienced by people.

### We

The We dimension concerns relationships. It focuses on what emerges between people rather than within them. Trust, dialogue, misunderstanding, cooperation, conflict, belonging and collective sensemaking all emerge within this relational space. Many contemporary challenges are often described as technical, political or organisational. Yet in practice they frequently involve questions of relationship. How do people coordinate? understanding itself is formed. >>

>> How do they establish legitimacy?  
How do they navigate disagreement?  
How do they build trust?  
The We dimension invites attention to the quality of these relationships and to the meanings that emerge through them.

### World

The World dimension concerns context. It includes the wider conditions within which participation takes place. Institutions. Technologies. Economic structures. Policies. Governance systems. Ecological realities. Cultural narratives. These broader conditions shape what appears possible, desirable or legitimate. At the same time, they are continuously influenced by human action. The World dimension reminds us that situations never exist in isolation. They are always embedded within larger systems of relationship and dependency.

### A Relational Perspective

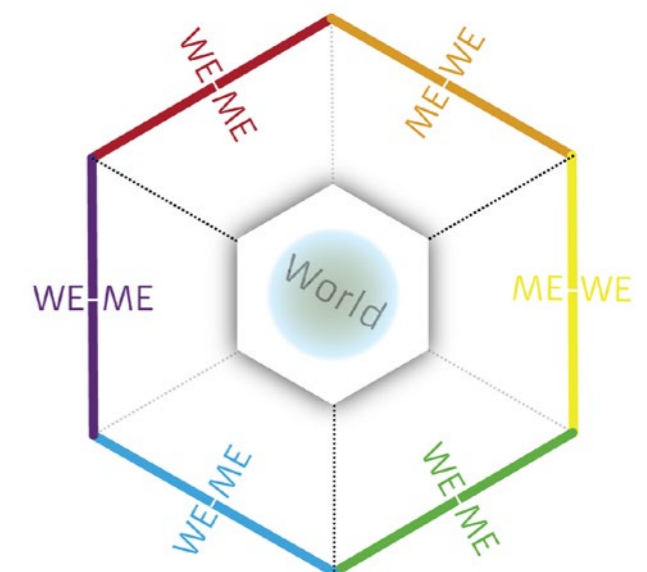
The value of the relational field does not lie in the three dimensions themselves. Its value lies in the movement between them. A concern expressed at the level of Me may reveal a pattern at the level of We. A tension within the We dimension may be reinforced by conditions at the level of World. A policy decision at the level of World may alter the experience of individuals and communities. Relational Reading therefore pays attention not only to what appears within each dimension, but also to how the dimensions influence one another. >>

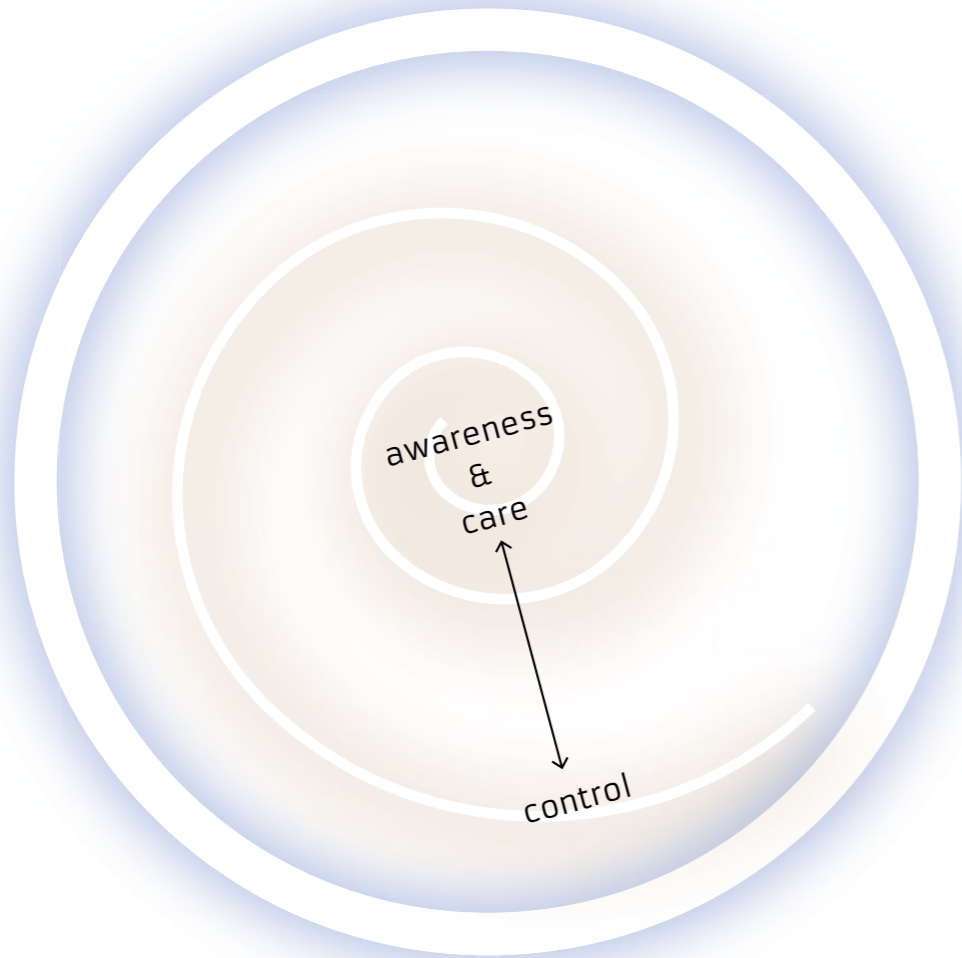
The aim is not to determine which dimension matters most. The aim is to cultivate awareness of their interdependence.

### From Dimensions to Reading

The relational field provides an orientation. It helps reveal where attention is being directed and where important aspects of a situation may remain unseen. Yet orientation alone is not enough. Once a situation is approached through the dimensions of Me, We and World, another question emerges: What exactly are we reading within these dimensions? This question led to the development of a second layer of observation. Not simply where we look, but what we look for. The next chapter introduces this reading framework through three interconnected lenses:

**Conditions, Relations and Actions. >>**





### >> Beyond Human-Centred and System-Centred Thinking

Contemporary approaches often position themselves along a spectrum.

Some begin with human experience.

Others begin with systems, structures and incentives.

Both perspectives provide valuable insights.

Yet each risks becoming incomplete when treated as sufficient on its own.

Human-centred approaches may overlook systemic conditions.

System-centred approaches may overlook lived experience and meaning.

Me-We-World therefore adopts a different position.

Not human-centred.

Not system-centred.

But relation-centred.

Its primary concern is neither individuals nor systems in isolation.

Its concern is the relationships through which individuals, communities, institutions and environments continuously shape one another.

The relational field exists precisely within these interactions. <<

Life



### What Are We Actually Looking At?

Once a situation is approached through the dimensions of Me, We and World, another challenge quickly emerges.

Where should attention be directed?

Even relatively simple situations contain an overwhelming amount of information.

People describe experiences.

Relationships influence interpretation.

Institutions create constraints.

Events unfold.

Decisions are made.

Consequences emerge.

Without some form of orientation, it becomes difficult to distinguish between what is happening, why it is happening and what might happen next.

The challenge is not only where to look.

The challenge is what to look for.

### Three Modes of Reading

Over time, a recurring pattern began to emerge across different contexts.

Whether people were discussing community initiatives, governance questions, organisational change, technology projects or societal transitions, their observations often clustered around three different aspects of a situation.

They spoke about circumstances.

They spoke about relationships.

And they spoke about actions.

This observation eventually led to the development of the C·R·A framework:

**Conditions — Relations — Actions**

Not as a sequence.

Not as a process model.

But as three complementary modes of reading.

>>

### Conditions

Conditions refer to the circumstances within which a situation unfolds.

Some conditions are visible.

Others remain largely unnoticed until they begin to influence behaviour.

Conditions may include:

- available resources
- institutional constraints
- emotional states
- historical circumstances
- technological infrastructures
- social norms
- environmental realities

Conditions do not determine outcomes.

They influence possibilities.

They shape the space within which relationships and actions become possible.

When conditions remain invisible, interventions often address symptoms rather than causes.

### Relations

Relations concern the connections through which meaning emerges.

People rarely respond directly to events.

They respond to how events are interpreted.

These interpretations are influenced by relationships.

Between individuals.

Between communities.

Between institutions.

Between people and systems. >>

>> Relations influence:

- trust
- legitimacy
- expectations
- power
- cooperation
- conflict

They shape how situations are understood and how responses become coordinated.

What appears to be a disagreement about action often reveals a difference in relationship or interpretation.

### Actions

Actions refer to the decisions, behaviours and interventions that become visible within a situation.

Actions include:

- individual choices
- collective agreements
- organisational decisions
- policies
- technologies
- governance arrangements

Actions are often the most visible aspect of a situation.

For this reason they frequently receive the greatest attention.

Yet actions do not emerge in isolation. They are influenced by conditions and relationships, while simultaneously reshaping both.

Every action creates new conditions.

Every action alters relationships.

The cycle continues. >>

### Reading Across Me, We and World

The CRA framework becomes particularly useful when combined with the relational field introduced in the previous chapter.

Conditions, Relations and Actions can all be explored through the dimensions of:

- Me
- We
- World

This creates a richer picture of a situation. A challenge that appears personal may reveal collective dynamics.

A relational tension may be reinforced by systemic conditions.

An institutional intervention may influence individual experience in unexpected ways.

The purpose is not to fill every box in a matrix.

The purpose is to cultivate a more comprehensive reading of the situation being explored.

### From Awareness to Conditions

Earlier versions of Me–We–World used a different framework:

#### Awareness – Relations – Actions

This insight led to a shift.

Rather than beginning with awareness, the framework now begins with conditions.

Not because awareness is unimportant.

But because awareness itself emerges within conditions.

The transition from A·R·A to C·R·A reflects a broader movement within MWW:

from understanding reality as something that is observed from a distance towards

understanding reality as something in which we already participate. >>



|            | Me                   | We                    | World                   |
|------------|----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| Conditions | Embodied condition   | Relational condition  | Contextual condition    |
| Relation   | Personal positioning | Shared meaning-making | Structural framing      |
| Action     | Personal commitment  | Collective agreements | Systemic implementation |

### >> Reading Before Solving

The purpose of CRA is not to explain everything. Nor is it intended to replace specialised expertise.

Its purpose is more modest.

It offers a way of slowing down the tendency to move directly towards solutions.

By exploring conditions, relations and actions together, practitioners often discover aspects of a situation that would otherwise remain invisible.

In this sense, CRA functions less as an analytical tool and more as a discipline of attention.

A way of reading before responding.

### Towards Relational Quality

While C·R·A helps reveal the structure of a situation, another question remains.

Two situations may contain similar conditions, relationships and actions, yet feel profoundly different.

One may generate trust.

Another may produce anxiety.

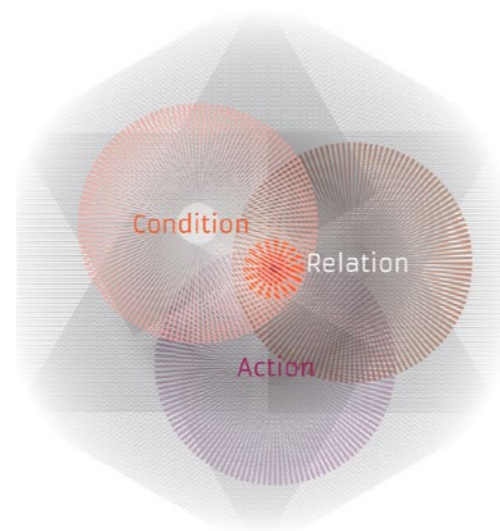
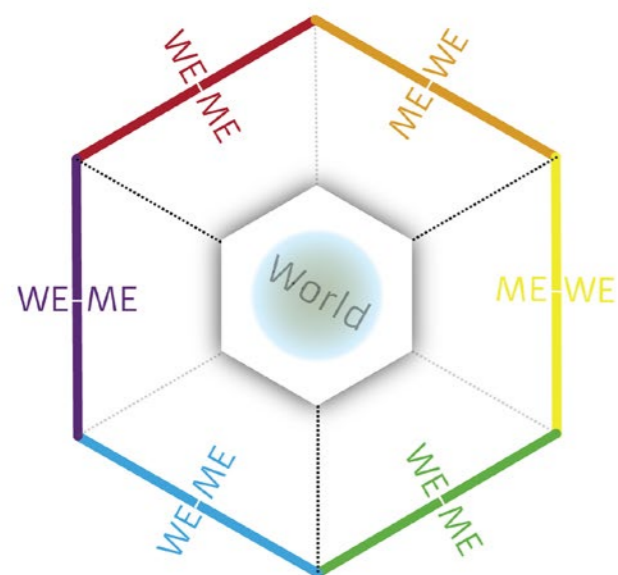
One may invite participation.

Another may lead to withdrawal.

To better understand these differences, MWW introduces a second layer of observation.

Not focused on structure, but on quality.

The next chapter explores this dimension through the S·T·U·A·R·T framework. <<





## Reading Relational Quality

The C·R·A framework helps reveal the structure of a situation.

It invites attention towards conditions, relations and actions across the dimensions of Me, We and World.

Yet structure alone does not tell the whole story.

Two situations may appear similar when viewed through C·R·A.

The same stakeholders may be present.

The same governance structures may exist.

The same objectives may be pursued.

And yet the experience of participation can be fundamentally different.

One situation may generate trust and engagement.

Another may produce resistance and withdrawal.

One may invite curiosity and dialogue.

Another may reinforce defensiveness and polarisation.

The difference often lies not in the structure itself, but in the quality of the relational field.

## Beyond Outcomes

Many contemporary frameworks evaluate success through outcomes.

Did the project succeed?

Were objectives achieved?

Did performance improve?

These questions remain important.

At the same time, they often overlook something that becomes visible much earlier.

The quality of participation itself. People frequently sense when something is missing long before measurable outcomes appear.

Trust may begin to erode. >>

Understanding may decline.

People may become less willing to engage.

The situation may remain formally functional while relationally deteriorating.

S·T·U·A·R·T emerged from the observation that these qualities deserve attention in their own right.

## Six Relational Qualities

S·T·U·A·R·T consists of six interconnected qualities:

- Safety
- Trust
- Understanding
- Awareness
- Relaxation
- Togetherness

Rather than describing ideal states, these qualities function as indicators.

They help reveal what may be present, absent or under pressure within a relational field.

The framework therefore asks not:

Are we successful?

but:

What is happening to the quality of participation?

## Safety

Safety concerns the extent to which people feel able to participate without fear of exclusion, humiliation or harm.

Safety creates space for contribution.

Without sufficient safety, participation often becomes defensive.

People protect themselves before they engage with one another.

The absence of safety rarely prevents interaction altogether. >>

>> More often it changes the character of that interaction.

## Trust

Trust concerns confidence in relationships, intentions and processes.

Trust cannot simply be demanded or designed into existence.

It develops through experience.

When trust weakens, people often compensate through additional control, monitoring or verification.

While such measures may provide stability, they rarely replace trust itself.

Trust influences whether people are willing to remain engaged when uncertainty arises.

## Understanding

Understanding concerns the ability to recognise perspectives beyond one's own.

This does not require agreement.

Nor does it require abandoning one's position.

It involves the willingness to explore how others have come to see a situation as they do. Understanding expands the space within which dialogue becomes possible.

## Awareness

Awareness concerns the capacity to recognise connections that might otherwise remain unnoticed.

Within MWW, awareness is not limited to individual consciousness or self-reflection. It also includes awareness of relationships, dependencies, consequences and wider systemic conditions.

People rarely act in isolation.

Choices influence others.

Systems shape behaviour.

Contexts create possibilities while simultaneously introducing limitations.

Awareness expands the range of >>

>> relationships that can be perceived within a situation. As awareness grows, responsibility often becomes more visible as well.

Not because people are told what they should do, but because they begin to see more clearly how their actions participate in a wider field of relationships.

## Relaxation

Relaxation concerns the degree of ease within a relational field.

It reflects whether people experience sufficient space to think, question, experiment and engage without constant pressure.

Relaxation should not be confused with passivity or indifference.

In many situations it creates the conditions necessary for learning, creativity and dialogue. When relaxation is absent, urgency can become overwhelming.

People may feel compelled to defend positions, seek certainty or rush towards solutions before situations have been sufficiently explored.

Relaxation creates room for complexity without demanding immediate closure.

## Togetherness

Togetherness concerns the experience of belonging within a larger whole.

It reflects the degree to which people recognise themselves as participants in a shared reality rather than isolated actors pursuing separate interests.

This does not eliminate difference.

Nor does it imply consensus.

People may disagree while still experiencing a sense of connection and mutual responsibility.

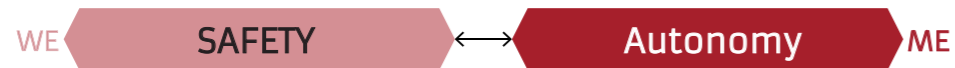
Togetherness becomes visible when relationships remain intact despite tension, uncertainty or disagreement.

It reminds us that participation is always relational. >>



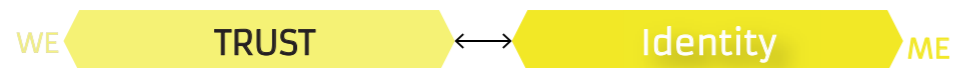
STUART = relational quality (WE field)

Individual values = inner capacity (ME field)



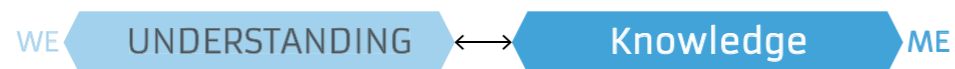
A relationally safe field emerges when individuals experience autonomy.

No autonomy → defensive behaviour → Safety declines.

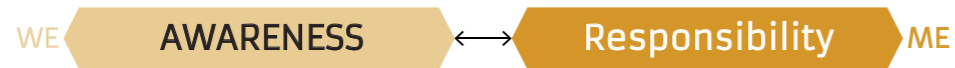


Trust grows when identity is not threatened.

Identity pressure → polarisation → Trust declines.



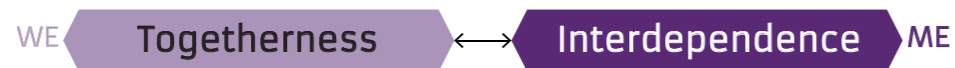
Understanding in the field requires that individuals possess knowledge and are willing to share it.



Collective awareness requires individual responsibility.



Relaxation in a group emerges when individuals accept differences.



Togetherness grows when individuals recognise mutual interdependence.

## Community Qualities Rather Than Individual Traits

One of the most common misunderstandings about STUART is the assumption that it describes personal characteristics.

This is not its primary purpose.

STUART does not ask whether individuals possess safety, trust or awareness.

Instead, it asks how these qualities are experienced within a relational field.

For this reason, STUART is best understood as a set of community qualities.

Qualities that emerge between people, institutions and contexts.

A situation may contain highly capable individuals while still lacking trust.

A technically successful project may still struggle with togetherness.

A well-governed organisation may still experience low levels of safety or understanding.

The focus therefore remains relational rather than individual.

## Reading Quality Before Judgement

STUART is not intended as a scorecard.

Its purpose is not to determine whether a situation is good or bad.

Nor is it designed to measure moral correctness.

Instead, it offers a way of observing the qualities that support or constrain participation.

This shift can be subtle but important.

Rather than asking:

Who is responsible for the problem?

attention moves towards questions such as:

Which qualities are under pressure?

What conditions make participation difficult?

What might this situation require? >>

>>The emphasis moves from blame towards understanding

## S·T·U·A·R·T and the Relational Field

The six qualities can be observed across all dimensions of the relational field.

At the level of Me, they influence personal experience and participation.

At the level of We, they influence relationships and collective processes.

At the level of World, they are affected by wider structures, institutions and systemic conditions.

STUART therefore complements the C·R·A framework.

CRA helps reveal what is happening.

STUART helps reveal how participation is experienced.

Together they provide a richer reading of complex situations.

## Towards Legitimacy

Even when conditions, relations and actions are understood, and even when the quality of participation becomes visible, another question often remains.

How do people determine what is fair, legitimate or justified?

Complex situations rarely involve facts alone. They also involve questions of responsibility, authority, values and ethics.

To explore these tensions, MWW introduces a second reading layer.

One that looks not at quality, but at legitimacy.

The next chapter introduces this perspective through the Double Lens of Law and Ethic. <<



### Beyond Facts and Participation

Complex situations rarely involve facts alone. Nor do they concern participation alone. Questions of governance, technology, community development, public policy and organisational change inevitably introduce another dimension. Questions of legitimacy. People may agree on the facts and still disagree about what should happen next. They may participate in the same process while holding very different views about what is fair, responsible or justified. As a result, many tensions that appear technical or procedural often reveal deeper questions about legitimacy.

### Two Ways of Looking

Over time, a recurring pattern became visible across many different situations. People tended to evaluate decisions through two different, yet equally important perspectives. One perspective focused on rules. The other focused on consequences. One asked: Is this allowed? The other asked: Is this right? Neither question could be reduced to the other. Both remained necessary. This observation eventually led to what MWW describes as the Double Lens:  
**Law ↔ Ethics** >>

### The Lens of Law

The legal perspective focuses on formal structures. Rules. Policies. Contracts. Procedures. Regulations. Governance arrangements. These structures help create predictability and coordination. Without them, collective action becomes difficult. The legal perspective asks questions such as:

- What has been agreed?
- What responsibilities have been as signed?
- Which rules apply?
- What is permitted?
- What is prohibited?

These questions help establish consistency and accountability. They provide an important foundation fo cooperation at scale.

### The Lens of Ethics

The ethical perspective focuses on lived experience. Not simply what is permitted, but what is experienced as fair, meaningful or responsible. The ethical perspective asks questions such as:

- Who is affected?
- Who benefits?
- Who carries the burden?
- What remains invisible?
- What responsibilities emerge through relationship?

>>

>> Ethics introduces dimensions that cannot always be fully captured by formal structures. It draws attention to dignity, care, legitimacy and human consequences.

### A Productive Tension

The purpose of the Double Lens is not to choose between law and ethics. Nor is it to merge them into a single perspective. Their value lies precisely in the tension between them. Situations regularly emerge in which actions may be legally valid while being experienced as ethically problematic. The opposite can also occur. An initiative may appear ethically compelling while conflicting with existing regulations or institutional responsibilities. When this tension remains invisible, conversations often become polarised. Participants argue about different aspects of the situation without recognising that they are using different lenses. The Double Lens helps make this distinction visible.

### Legitimacy as a Relational Question

Legitimacy is often treated as something that can be established through rules alone. Experience suggests that the situation is more complex. Legitimacy therefore emerges not only through structures, but also through relationships. It is influenced by trust. Participation. Transparency. Responsibility. Shared understanding. In this sense, legitimacy becomes a relational question rather than merely a procedural one.  
>>

### >> Governance Perspective

Within Me–We–World, legitimacy is not understood as a fixed property of institutions, nor as a purely subjective experience.

It emerges through the ongoing interaction between formal arrangements and lived participation.

The Double Lens therefore functions primarily as a governance perspective within the broader Navigation Ecology.

It helps practitioners explore how authority, responsibility, legitimacy and participation interact within shared realities.

### From Legitimacy to Navigation

The previous chapters introduced three layers of observation:

#### The Relational Field

Where are we looking?  
(Me – We – World)

#### C•R•A

What are we looking at?  
(Conditions – Relations – Actions)

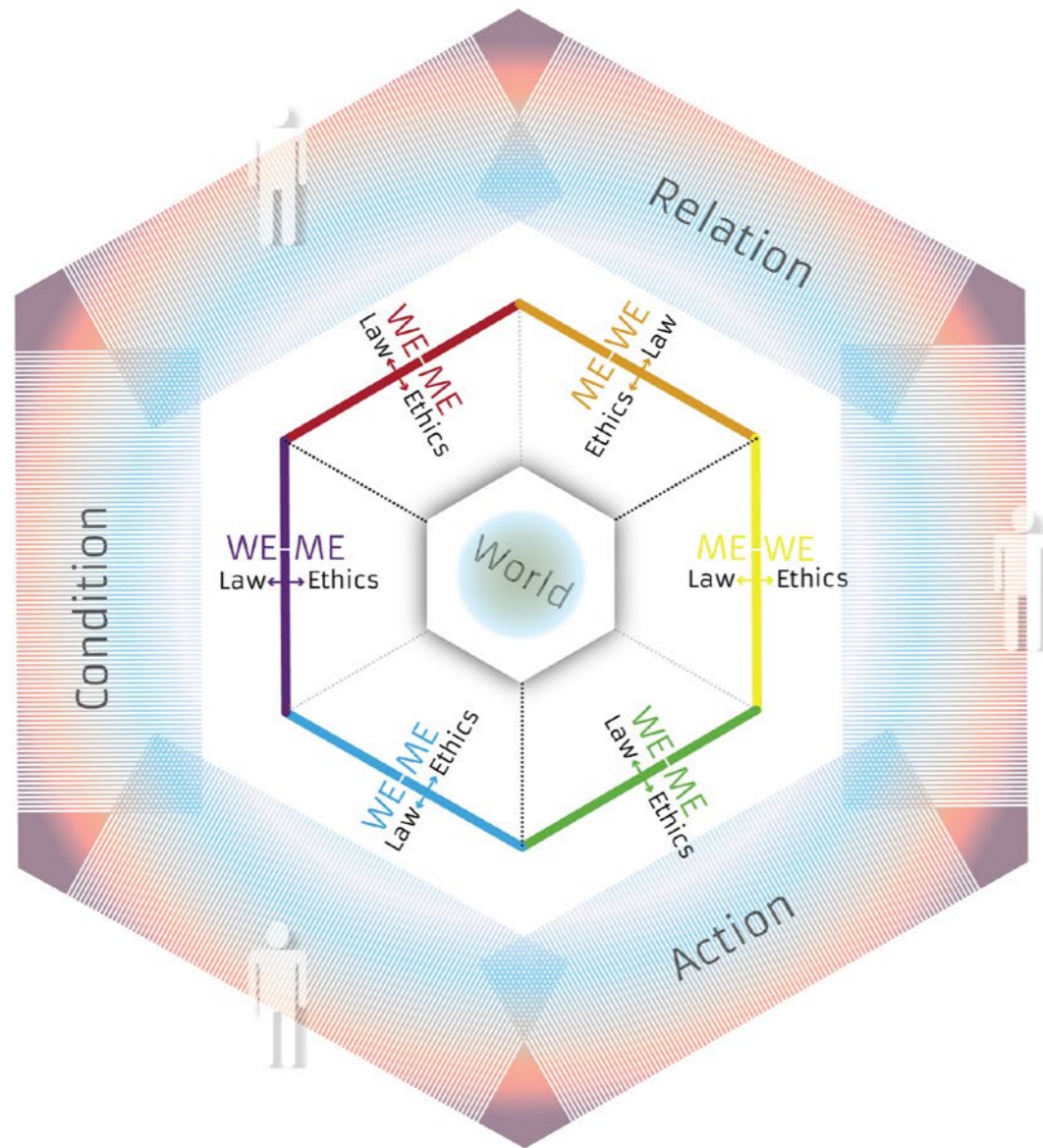
#### S•T•U•A•R•T

How is participation being experienced?  
(Relational Quality)

#### The Double Lens

How is legitimacy being understood?  
(Law ↔ Ethics)

Together these layers provide a more complete reading of complex situations. Yet another challenge remains. Even when situations are understood relationally, practitioners still face questions about navigation. >>



How do we move through complexity without reducing it too quickly?

How do we orient ourselves before deciding where and how to intervene?

These questions became increasingly important through encounters with systems thinking and the work of Donella Meadows. The next chapter explores this transition through a simple but consequential principle:

**Reading Before Leverage.**

Within the broader Navigation Ecology of Me-We-World, the Double Lens functions primarily as a governance perspective.

It helps practitioners explore questions of legitimacy that emerge whenever collective decisions affect shared realities.

For this reason, the Double Lens is particularly relevant within governance, stewardship, commons management and institutional design.

Its role is not to replace relational reading, but to deepen it. <<

Life

### A Question That Kept Returning

As Relational Reading evolved, systems thinking became an increasingly important influence.

The work of Donella Meadows, Gregory Bateson and many others offered valuable ways of understanding complexity, feedback loops, systemic behaviour and unintended consequences.

These perspectives helped explain why certain patterns persist even when people genuinely wish to change them.

They revealed that many challenges cannot be understood through isolated events alone.

Structures matter.

Feedback matters.

Incentives matter.

Relationships matter.

Yet throughout different projects and conversations, another question continued to emerge.

Not:

Where can a system be influenced?

But:

What are people actually responding to?

### The Search for Leverage

One of the most influential contributions of systems thinking has been the concept of leverage. Certain interventions have greater effects than others.

Changing a parameter may produce limited change.

Changing a rule may produce broader change.

Changing a paradigm may transform an entire system. >>

This insight remains enormously valuable.

It encourages people to look beyond symptoms and towards deeper systemic structures.

At the same time, practical experience revealed a recurring difficulty.

Before discussing leverage, participants often disagreed about the situation itself.

Different actors interpreted the same reality through different experiences, responsibilities and assumptions.

The question of where to intervene frequently depended on how the situation was being read.

### The Missing Step

Many intervention-oriented approaches implicitly assume that a situation has already been understood.

The challenge then becomes determining the most effective response.

Yet complex situations rarely arrive with a shared interpretation.

People may agree that change is needed while disagreeing about:

- what the problem is,
- who is affected,
- what should be protected,
- what should change,
- and what consequences deserve attention.

Under such conditions, the search for leverage can unintentionally reinforce existing assumptions rather than challenge them.

This does not make leverage irrelevant.

It suggests that another step may be necessary beforehand.

Orientation. >>

### >> Reading Before Leverage

Relational Reading emerged from the observation that understanding often requires a period of exploration before intervention becomes meaningful.

Before asking:

Where should we intervene?

it may be useful to ask:

What are we actually looking at?

What conditions are present?

Which relationships shape interpretation?

What meanings are influencing participation?

Which aspects of the situation remain outside the current frame?

These questions do not delay action for its own sake.

They create the possibility of acting with greater awareness of what is at stake.

### Difference Before Leverage

Gregory Bateson famously described information as "a difference that makes a difference."

This insight suggests that change rarely begins with intervention alone.

It begins when previously unnoticed differences become visible.

Different experiences.

Different interpretations.

Different relationships.

Different possibilities.

Relational Reading therefore asks a prior question:

Which differences are becoming visible?

Before leverage can be identified, meaningful difference must first be recognised.

Difference Receptivity creates the conditions under which leverage becomes intelligible. >>

### Beyond Optimisation

Modern institutions are often designed to improve performance.

Efficiency.

Consistency.

Predictability.

Accountability.

These objectives remain important.

Yet when optimisation becomes the dominant lens, there is a risk that certain aspects of reality gradually disappear from view.

Questions of meaning.

Questions of legitimacy.

Questions of lived experience.

Questions of relationship.

What cannot easily be measured may become difficult to discuss.

What remains difficult to discuss may gradually become invisible.

Relational Reading does not oppose optimisation.

It seeks to complement it by drawing attention to dimensions that optimisation alone may overlook.

### From Intervention to Orientation

This shift can be understood as a movement from intervention-first thinking towards orientation-first thinking.

Not because action is unimportant.

But because action inevitably influences relationships, meanings and conditions that may not yet be fully visible.

Orientation therefore becomes an act of responsibility.

A willingness to explore a situation before deciding how it should be changed.

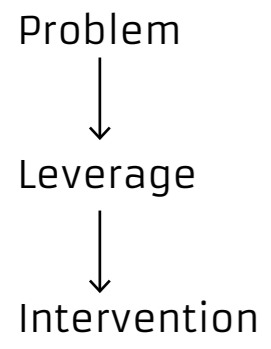
This does not guarantee better outcomes.

Nor does it eliminate uncertainty.

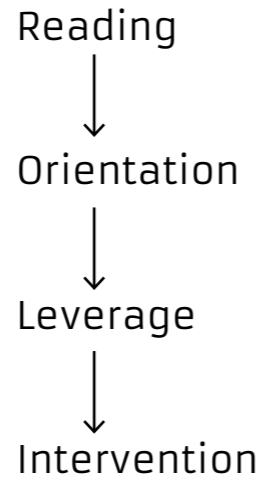
What it offers is the possibility of becoming more conscious of what interventions touch before deciding where leverage should be applied. >>



Traditional Intervention Logic



Relational Reading Logic Situation



>> A Bridge Between Systems and Relations

Relational Reading does not replace systems thinking.  
 Nor does it reject leverage.  
 On the contrary.  
 The capacity to recognise systemic patterns remains essential.  
 The question is how those patterns are approached.

Towards the Five Zones

As this inquiry developed, it became increasingly useful to distinguish between different layers of a situation.  
 Some observations concerned immediate conditions.  
 Others concerned recurring dynamics.  
 Others pointed towards structures, narratives or deeper transformations.  
 To support this exploration, MWW developed a relational interpretation of the work of Donella Meadows.  
 Rather than focusing immediately on leverage, the model invites practitioners to orient themselves within the situation first.  
 This became the basis of the Five Zones of Complexity.  
 The next chapter introduces this framework. <<



## From Reading to Navigation

The previous chapters introduced the foundations of Relational Reading. The relational field provides orientation through the dimensions of Me, We and World. C·R·A helps structure observation through Conditions, Relations and Actions. S·T·U·A·R·T reveals qualities of participation. The Double Lens explores questions of legitimacy. The Five Zones function as a bridge between Relational Reading and Systems Thinking by helping practitioners orient attention before identifying leverage opportunities. Together, these elements support a richer understanding of complex situations. Yet understanding alone is not enough. People still need ways to navigate complexity in practice. They need ways to move between perspectives, structure conversations, design interventions and explore possible futures. This need led to the development of what MWW describes as a Navigation Ecology.

## Beyond a Single Framework

Many frameworks attempt to provide a single model capable of addressing a wide variety of situations. Complexity rarely behaves so neatly. Different situations require different forms of inquiry. Different participants require different entry points. Different contexts call for different combinations of tools, practices and perspectives. For this reason, MWW evolved not as a single framework but as an interconnected ecology of of navigation elements. Rather than >>

>> prescribing a fixed path, the ecology supports movement between multiple pathways of exploration.

## Multiple Ways In

People rarely arrive with the same question. Some are looking for clarity. Others seek dialogue. Some wish to explore tensions. Others focus on governance, innovation or transformation. To accommodate these differences, MWW offers multiple entry points. Readers may enter through: a Route, an Intervention, a Lens, a Reading, or a specific practical challenge. The purpose is not to guide everyone along the same path. The purpose is to provide orientation appropriate to the situation being explored.

## The Navigation Layers

The Navigation Ecology consists of several interconnected layers. Each layer answers a different question:

| Layer              | Guiding Question                                |
|--------------------|---|
| <b>Me-We-World</b> | From which relational dimension are we looking? |
| <b>C·R·A</b>       | What are we looking at?                         |
| <b>S·T·U·A·R·T</b> | How is participation being experienced?         |
| <b>Double Lens</b> | How is legitimacy being understood?             |
| <b>Five Zones</b>  | At which systemic depth are we looking?         |

>>

>> Together these layers support the practice of Relational Reading. They help practitioners move between perspectives without reducing situations too quickly.

## Routes

The first navigational layer consists of Routes. Routes provide different pathways through complexity depending on the nature of the inquiry. Rather than describing fixed processes, they function as orientations for exploration. Some routes focus on immediate situations. Others explore relationships, systems, meanings or possibilities for transformation. The Routes help practitioners determine where attention may be most useful at a given moment.

## Lenses

Lenses provide thematic perspectives through which situations can be explored. Within MWW, these lenses include:

- People
- Planet
- Value Systems
- Technology
- Governance

Together they form the PPVTG Lens Framework. Lenses do not replace Relational Reading. They focus attention on specific aspects of a situation while remaining connected to the wider relational field.

## Facilitation Modes

Different situations require different forms of engagement. Dialogue, reflection, sensemaking, prototyping, speculative exploration and >>

>> commons-based inquiry each create different conditions for participation. Facilitation Modes help practitioners choose appropriate forms of interaction depending on the nature of the situation and the needs of participants.

## Transfers and Artifacts

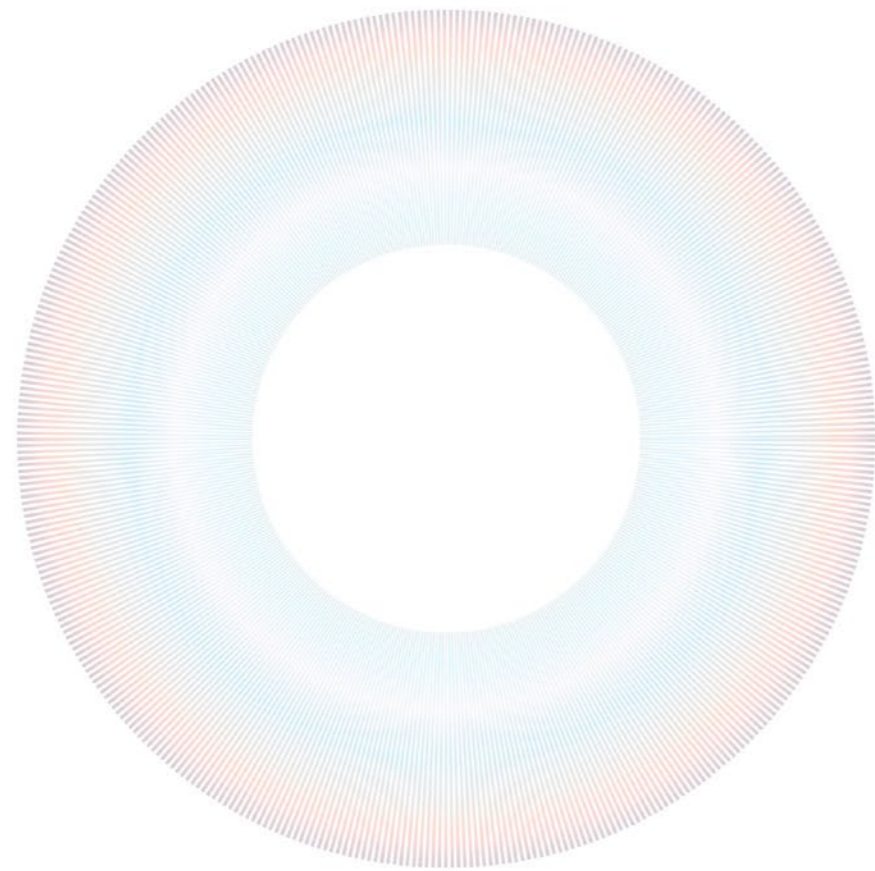
The Navigation Ecology is supported by a growing collection of practical resources. These include:

- canvases,
- card sets,
- visual tools,
- readings,
- workshops,
- and other supporting artifacts.

These resources are not intended as standalone solutions. They function as vehicles for Relational Reading. Their value depends upon how they are used and within which context they are applied.

## A Living Practice

The Navigation Ecology should not be understood as a finished system. New contexts continue to reveal new questions. New challenges require new forms of exploration. New practices emerge through application and experimentation. For this reason, MWW is best understood as a living practice rather than a static methodology. Its purpose is not to eliminate uncertainty, but to support more conscious navigation within it. >>



## >> Meadows Reinterpreted

The five zones do not replace Donella Meadows' leverage points. They provide an additional reading layer. A way of exploring what leverage points influence before deciding how they should be used. The purpose is not merely to identify opportunities for intervention. It is to understand how interventions relate to conditions, relationships, legitimacy and participation. In this sense, the five zones function as a bridge between Relational Reading and Systems Thinking.

## From Navigation to Discipline

As the Navigation Ecology evolved, another insight gradually emerged. The individual components were not the central innovation. The routes, matrices, lenses and artifacts all served a deeper purpose. They supported a practice that increasingly resembled a discipline in its own right. A discipline concerned with reading relationships before designing interventions. A discipline concerned with orientation before optimisation. A discipline concerned with participation before certainty. This raises a final question: Could Relational Reading become a distinct field of inquiry in its own right? The final chapter explores this possibility. <<

Life



## Orienting Within Complexity

One of the recurring challenges in complex situations is knowing where to begin.

People often enter conversations carrying different concerns.

Some focus on immediate circumstances.

Others focus on recurring patterns.

Some point towards institutions and structures.

Others draw attention to values, narratives or long-term transformation.

All of these perspectives may be relevant.

The difficulty lies in understanding how they relate to one another.

Without orientation, discussions can easily become fragmented. Participants may appear to disagree while in reality they are simply focusing on different aspects of the same situation.

The Five Zones were developed to support this process of orientation.

## From Leverage to Orientation

The work of Donella Meadows provided important insights into leverage, feedback loops and systemic change.

Her work helps explain why some interventions create greater effects than others and why certain patterns persist despite repeated efforts to change them.

These insights remain highly valuable.

At the same time, practical experience suggested that before discussing leverage, people often needed a way of understanding what they were actually looking at.

Questions such as:

- What is happening here?
- What keeps repeating?

>>

- What structures shape behaviour?
- What meanings influence interpretation?
- What possibilities are beginning to emerge?

often proved more useful at the beginning of a conversation than questions about intervention.

The Five Zones emerged as a relational interpretation of this challenge.

Not as a model for changing systems, but as a way of orienting attention before deciding where and how change might occur.

## Zone A — Conditions

The first zone concerns visible conditions.

These include immediate circumstances, available resources, environmental realities, social contexts and practical constraints.

Conditions shape the space within which participation becomes possible.

Questions include:

What is present?

What is absent?

What constraints are shaping the situation?

What opportunities are available?

## Zone B — Dynamics

The second zone focuses on recurring patterns.

Attention shifts from individual events towards what keeps happening over time.

Dynamics may include:

- feedback loops
- dependencies
- recurring behaviours
- adaptive responses
- reinforcing tensions >>

Questions include:

- What keeps repeating?
- Which patterns reinforce themselves?
- What remains unresolved?

## Zone C — Structures

The third zone concerns the structures that organise participation.

These may include institutions, governance arrangements, regulations, incentives, organisational systems and information flows.

Structures influence what becomes possible, desirable or rewarded.

Questions include:

- What structures shape behaviour?
- Who makes decisions?
- What rules influence participation?
- Which incentives are present?

## Zone D — Meaning and Systems

The fourth zone explores the relationship between meaning and system design.

People do not respond to structures alone.

They respond to what those structures mean.

Narratives, assumptions, values, identities and worldviews influence how systems are interpreted and how people choose to participate within them.

Questions include:

- How is the situation understood?
- Which assumptions shape behaviour?
- What remains unquestioned?
- How do meanings influence systems and how
- do systems reinforce meaning? >>

## >> Zone E — Transformation

The fifth zone concerns emergence and possibility.

Rather than focusing on what already exists, attention shifts towards what is becoming possible.

Transformation may involve:

- experimentation
- innovation
- paradigm shifts
- systemic transitions
- emerging futures

Questions include:

- What is beginning to emerge?
- What no longer fits?
- Which possibilities are becoming visible?
- What future conditions are taking shape?

## Relational Dimensions and Systemic Depth

The Five Zones should not be understood as separate layers of reality.

Rather, they represent different depths of observation.

They can be explored through all three dimensions of the relational field:

Me – We – World

A practitioner may explore personal experiences within the Zone of Meaning and Systems.

A community may explore relational dynamics within the Zone of Structures.

A governance process may investigate systemic conditions within the Zone of Transformation.

Me–We–World therefore helps answer: From which relational dimension are we looking? >>



## MWW Navigation Logic

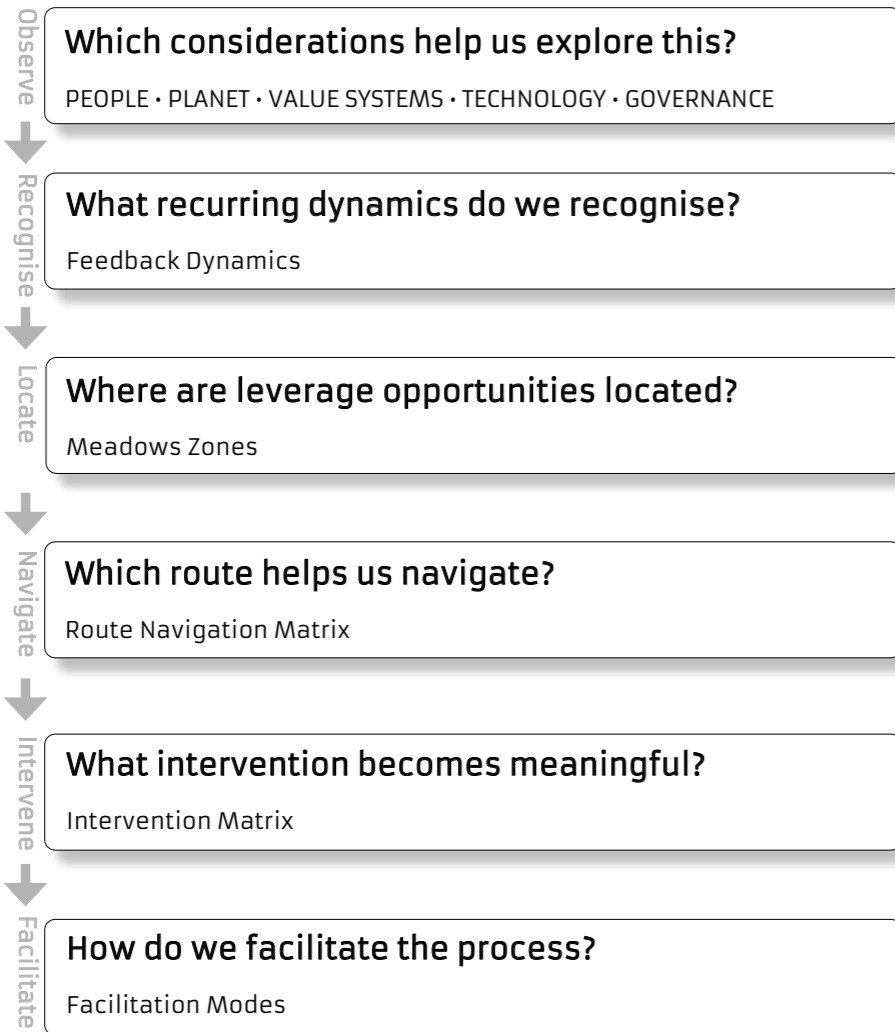
Where are we looking?

ME · WE · WORLD



What are we looking at?

CONDITIONS · RELATIONS · ACTIONS



The Five Zones help answer:

At which systemic depth are we looking?

Together they create a multidimensional reading of complexity.

## Reading Within the Zones

The Five Zones do not replace the C·R·A framework.

They serve a different purpose.

The Five Zones orient attention.

C·R·A structures observation.

Within any zone, practitioners can explore:

- Conditions
- Relations
- Actions

## A Relational Interpretation of Meadows

The Five Zones are inspired by the work of Donella Meadows but should not be understood as a replacement for her leverage points.

Meadows helps us understand where intervention may create systemic change.

The Five Zones help us understand where attention is currently focused before intervention begins.

This distinction reflects the broader logic of Relational Reading.

Before deciding how to change a situation, it may be necessary to understand how that situation is being interpreted.

The Five Zones therefore function as a bridge between observation and intervention.

Between systems thinking and relational thinking.

Between leverage and orientation. <<

Life

### Beyond Frameworks

Throughout this Foundation Paper, Relational Reading has been introduced through a series of concepts, lenses and navigation structures. The relational field.

Conditions, Relations and Actions.

S·T·U·A·R·T.

The Double Lens.

The Five Zones.

The Navigation Ecology.

Taken together, these elements may resemble a framework.

Yet over time, another possibility began to emerge.

Perhaps the primary contribution of MWW is not a framework at all.

Perhaps it is the gradual development of a discipline.

A discipline concerned with how situations are read before decisions are made about how they should change.

### The Challenge of Participation

Many approaches to complexity begin from a position of observation.

A situation is analysed.

A system is mapped.

An intervention is designed.

Relational Reading starts from a different premise.

People are never entirely outside the situations they seek to understand.

They participate within them.

Through their histories.

Their responsibilities.

Their relationships.

Their institutions.

Their assumptions. >>

Every reading is therefore also a form of participation.

The observer is never completely separate from what is being observed.

This does not invalidate understanding.

It changes the nature of understanding itself.

### Living With Incomplete Knowledge

Complexity confronts us with a simple but uncomfortable reality.

No individual, organisation or institution can fully grasp the whole of a situation.

Knowledge remains distributed.

Experience remains situated.

Perspective remains partial.

For centuries, many traditions have sought certainty through better information, better models and better explanations.

These efforts remain valuable.

Yet complex realities continually remind us that understanding always remains incomplete.

The challenge is therefore not to eliminate uncertainty.

The challenge is learning how to act responsibly in its presence.

Relational Reading does not offer a final perspective from which reality can be fully understood.

It offers practices for navigating situations in which multiple partial understandings coexist.

### Perspective Mobility

One of the emerging concepts within MWW is Perspective Mobility.

The concept emerged through a recurring observation. >>

>> People often become attached to familiar interpretations of reality. Over time, alternative possibilities become difficult to imagine. The challenge is not necessarily a lack of information.

Nor is it simply a lack of awareness.

More often, it concerns the capacity to recognise that what appears normal, inevitable or self-evident could also be understood differently.

Perspective Mobility refers to this capacity.

The ability to temporarily move beyond familiar interpretations and seriously explore alternative possibilities without immediately returning to established assumptions.

It does not require abandoning one's values, responsibilities or commitments.

Nor does it imply that every perspective is equally valid.

Rather, it reflects a willingness to remain in dialogue with perspectives that challenge one's own.

In this sense, Perspective Mobility may become one of the defining capacities required for navigating increasingly interconnected realities.

### Between Relativism and Dogma

The recognition that perspectives are partial can lead in different directions.

One response is to search for certainty.

To identify the correct interpretation and dismiss competing views.

Another response is to conclude that all interpretations are equally valid and that no meaningful judgement can be made.

Relational Reading follows neither path. >>

>> It acknowledges that every perspective reveals something and conceals something. At the same time, it recognises that decisions remain necessary.

People must still choose.

Communities must still coordinate.

Institutions must still govern.

Participation requires position-taking.

The challenge is therefore not to avoid judgement, but to remain aware of the conditions under which judgement takes place.

Relational openness without responsibility risks becoming relativism.

Responsibility without relational openness risks becoming dogma.

Relational Reading attempts to navigate the space between these two tendencies.

### A Relational View of Change

Change is often described as the implementation of new ideas, policies, technologies or structures.

Relational Reading suggests another possibility.

Perhaps meaningful change begins slightly earlier.

Not with answers.

Not with interventions.

But with the emergence of a question that was previously invisible.

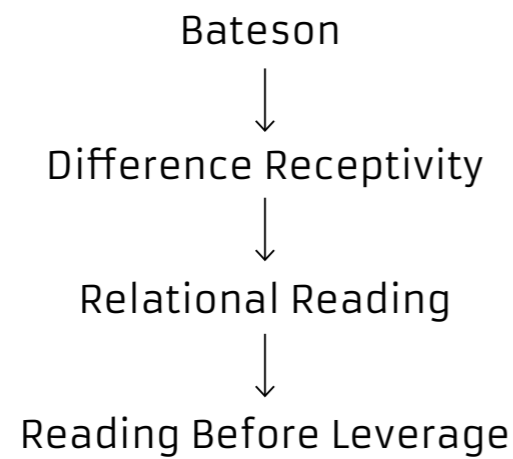
A situation that once appeared self-evident becomes open to exploration.

Alternative possibilities become imaginable.

New relationships become visible.

Different futures become conceivable.

In this sense, change begins not when certainty is achieved, but when interpretation becomes mobile. >>



### >> Towards a Living Practice

Relational Reading is not the search for the correct perspective.  
 It is the practice of remaining receptive to meaningful differences long enough for wiser action to become possible.  
 This may ultimately prove to be the central challenge of complexity.  
 Not a lack of information.  
 Not a lack of expertise.  
 Not even a lack of solutions.  
 But a lack of practices capable of helping people recognise meaningful differences before deciding how to act.  
 Me–We–World does not claim to solve complexity.  
 Its contribution is more modest.  
 It offers a way of reading, navigating and participating within complexity before intervention becomes inevitable.  
 If a new discipline is emerging, it may begin here.

### Closing Reflection

Perhaps the greatest challenge of our time is not that the world has become more complex. Perhaps it is that the relationships through which complexity becomes meaningful have become harder to perceive.  
 If this is the case, then the task before us is not merely to develop better solutions. It is to cultivate better ways of reading.  
 Not reading as analysis alone.  
 Not reading as interpretation alone.  
 But reading as a relational practice.  
 A practice that helps individuals, communities and institutions navigate the space between certainty and uncertainty, between action and reflection, between what is known and what is still emerging.  
 This is the ambition of Relational Reading.  
 And the ongoing inquiry of Me–We–World. <<

Life



## Origins and Development

Me–We–World emerged from a longer trajectory of experimentation, dialogue and practice.

The original Me–We game was developed through the collaboration of Lawrence Kwakye, Simone de Wijn and Geert-Jan van der Wolf. During this period, questions concerning individual and collective perspectives, participation and human interaction were explored through game-based and experiential approaches.

In 2020, Lawrence Kwakye initiated the transition from the Me–We game towards Me–We–World as a broader relational framework capable of engaging not only personal and collective realities, but also wider societal and systemic contexts.

Subsequent development took place through ongoing practice, facilitation, community work, systems thinking, design research and collaborative inquiry. The framework continues to evolve as a living practice rather than a finished methodology.

The development of Me–We–World has been shaped not only by theory, but by years of collaborative practice. The original Me–We game emerged through the collaboration of Lawrence Kwakye, Simone de Wijn and Geert-Jan van der Wolf. Subsequent development was informed through community work, facilitation, systems thinking, design practice and real-world participation processes. Many of the relational insights described throughout this paper emerged through lived practice rather than theoretical inquiry alone.

## Intellectual Influences and Traditions

No framework emerges in isolation.

Me–We–World builds upon a long history of inquiry into complexity, systems, participation, meaning, governance, ecology and human relationships.

The ideas presented in this paper should not be understood as entirely new. Rather, they represent a particular interpretation, integration and practical development of questions that have been explored by many thinkers, practitioners and traditions before us. Like all forms of knowledge, Me–We–World stands on the shoulders of those who came before, while contributing its own perspectives, practices and interpretations to an ongoing conversation.

The thinkers, traditions and works listed below have been particularly influential in shaping this journey.

## Intellectual Influences and Traditions

### Systems Thinking, Complexity and Relational Inquiry

Gregory Bateson  
Learning, context, relationships, ecology of mind, "difference that makes a difference."

Donella Meadows  
Systems thinking, leverage points, systemic intervention and feedback dynamics.

Edgar Morin  
Complexity, uncertainty, transdisciplinary thinking and non-reductionism.

Nora Bateson  
Warm Data, transcontextual understanding and relational complexity.

Machiel Tesser  
Lean Blockchain Systems Thinking, value streams, organisational systems and practical systems thinking.

### Philosophy, Meaning and Reality

C.A. Oudemans  
Nature, participation, reality, interpretation and the limits of abstraction.

Key works:  
Moeder Natuur  
In Natura  
Echte Filosofie

Martin Heidegger  
World, technology, dwelling and modes of understanding.

Federico Campagna  
World-making, technics, imagination and alternative realities.

Alfred Korzybski  
General Semantics and the distinction between maps and territories.

### Ethics, Community and Human Relations

Ubuntu Philosophy  
Mogobe B. Ramose  
Edward Schillebeeckx

### Commons, Governance and Collective Organisation

Elinor Ostrom  
Commons governance and collective stewardship.

Michel Bauwens  
Peer-to-peer systems, commons-based governance and collaborative value creation.

### Design, Participation and Practice

Design Thinking Traditions  
Participatory Design  
Community Building and Facilitation Practice

### Leadership, Culture and Societal Change

Simon Sinek  
Purpose, trust and collective motivation.  
Charles C. Mann  
Particularly The Wizard and the Prophet for exploring tensions between technological optimism and ecological limits.

## Selected References

### Complexity & Systems

- Bateson, Gregory — Steps to an Ecology of Mind
- Bateson, Gregory — Mind and Nature
- Meadows, Donella — Thinking in Systems
- Meadows, Donella — Leverage Points
- Morin, Edgar — On Complexity
- Bateson, Nora — Small Arcs of Larger Circles
- Tesser, Machiel — Lean Blockchain Systems Thinking
- Tesser, Machiel — Reinventing Value Streams

### Philosophy & Meaning

- Oudemans, C.A. — Moeder Natuur
- Oudemans, C.A. — In Natura
- Oudemans, C.A. — Echte Filosofie
- Heidegger, Martin — The Question Concerning Technology
- Campagna, Federico — Technic and Magic
- Korzybski, Alfred — Science and Sanity

### Commons & Governance

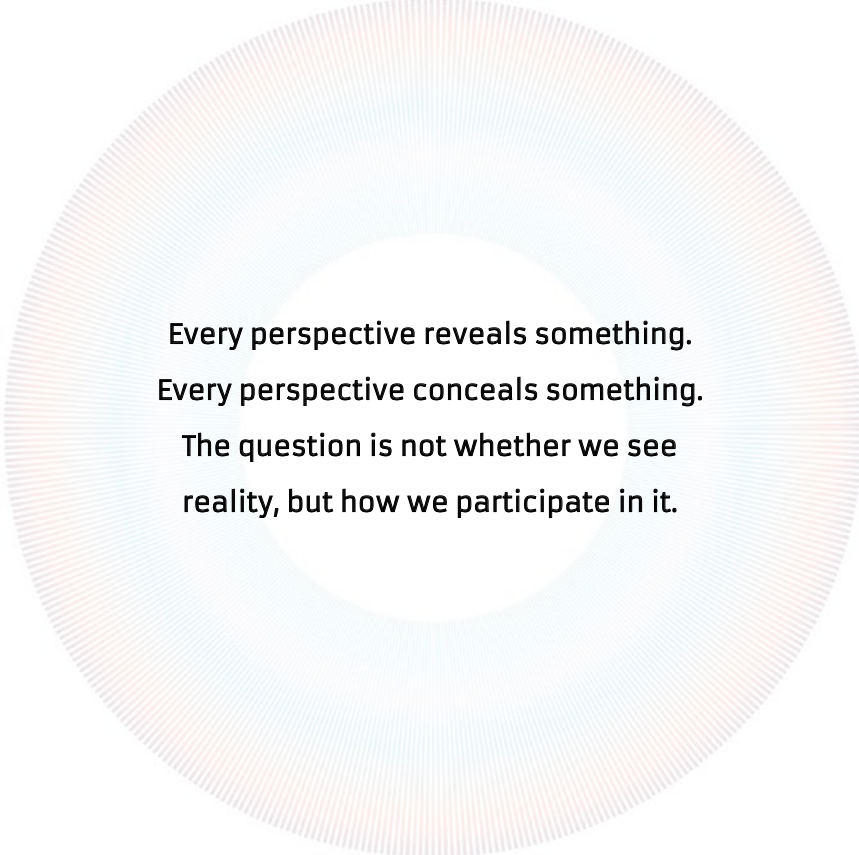
- Ostrom, Elinor — Governing the Commons
- Bauwens, Michel et al. — The Commons Manifesto

### Community & Human Relations

- Ramose, Mogobe B. — African Philosophy Through Ubuntu
- Schillebeeckx, Edward — (relevant works on human experience and meaning)

### Society & Transitions

- Mann, Charles C. — The Wizard and the Prophet
- Sinek, Simon — Start With Why



**Every perspective reveals something.  
Every perspective conceals something.  
The question is not whether we see  
reality, but how we participate in it.**