

# Capacity Compass: Capacity Definitions & Glossary of Key Concepts

This guide offers clear definitions of the 16 individual and 12 collective capacities that form the Capacity Compass framework, along with a glossary that provides definitions for the core concepts that underpin the Compass and our broader work at Unity Effect. These definitions provide a shared language for the essential human and relational qualities needed for regenerative impact.

Curious to learn more about the Capacity Compass and how it can support your work? [We'd love to hear from you.](#) Whether you're interested in exploring how the Compass applies to your specific context, accessing our item library with questions from ~75 academically validated assessments, or creating customisable surveys for measuring individual and collective capacities, we're here to help.

## Individual Capacity Definitions

### Inner clarity

Inner Clarity is the capacity to connect with and understand one's inner world—including core values, personal purpose, and emotional state—and to use this self-awareness as a reliable guide for making aligned decisions.

### Self-compassion

Self-Compassion is the capacity to treat oneself with the same kindness, care, and understanding that one would offer to a good friend, especially in moments of failure, inadequacy, or suffering.

### Emotional self-regulation

Emotional Self-Regulation is the capacity to be aware of and skillfully manage one's own emotional states and impulses, enabling a conscious response to situations rather than an automatic reaction.

### Physical wellbeing

Physical Wellbeing is the capacity to listen and respond to the body's needs through restorative practices like sleep, nutrition, and movement, enabling the sustained energy and vitality required to engage fully with life and work.

## **Courage**

Courage is the capacity to act in alignment with one's values and purpose in the presence of fear, uncertainty, and potential opposition.

## **Goal-orientation**

Goal-orientation is the capacity to translate a larger vision or purpose into clear, actionable, and aligned goals, and to maintain the focus and discipline required to move towards them.

## **Curiosity & desire to learn**

Curiosity & Desire to Learn is the capacity to maintain an open, inquisitive, and humble stance towards the world, actively seeking out new knowledge, perspectives, and experiences for the sake of growth and understanding.

## **Resilience**

Resilience is the capacity to navigate stress, setbacks, and adversity by drawing on inner and outer resources, allowing one to adapt, learn, and grow through the experience.

## **Optimism**

Optimism is the capacity to maintain a hopeful and resilient outlook on the future, viewing setbacks as temporary and specific, while holding a fundamental belief in one's own and others' ability to influence positive outcomes.

## **Empathy**

Empathy is the capacity to sense and understand the feelings, perspectives, and experiences of another person, and to use that understanding to guide one's actions and build connection.

## **Humility**

Humility is the capacity to hold one's own abilities and contributions in perspective, which creates the space to be genuinely appreciative of and to value the unique strengths and contributions of others.

## **Self-transcendence**

Self-Transcendence is the capacity to move beyond a narrow focus on the self to find meaning and motivation in a purpose, a community, or a service that is larger than one's own personal concerns.

## **Engaging with complexity**

Engaging with Complexity is the individual capacity to embrace change and uncertainty as inherent parts of life. It involves moving beyond simplistic, linear thinking and instead adopting a proactive stance of experimentation and curiosity when navigating ambiguous or multifaceted challenges.

## **Empowering others**

Empowering Others is the capacity to foster the autonomy, agency, and development of those around you by creating conditions of high trust and high responsibility.

## **Forming meaningful relationships**

Forming Meaningful Relationships is the capacity to build and nurture connections grounded in mutual trust and care, while also recognizing and communicating one's own needs and boundaries to keep the relationship healthy.

## **Adapting to social context**

Adapting to Social Context is the capacity to accurately read the social and cultural cues of a given environment and to flexibly adjust one's own behaviour and communication style to be effective and respectful.

## **Collective Capacity Definitions**

### **Wellbeing**

Wellbeing is the collective capacity to create and maintain an environment that supports the holistic health—physical, mental, and emotional—of its members, enabling sustained engagement and preventing burnout.

### **Intrinsic motivation**

Intrinsic Motivation is the collective capacity to foster an environment where individuals are driven by an inherent sense of purpose, mastery, and autonomy in their work.

### **Psychological safety**

Psychological Safety is a shared belief within a group that the environment is safe for interpersonal risk-taking, allowing members to speak up, share ideas, and admit mistakes without fear of punishment or humiliation.

### **Internal collaboration**

Internal Collaboration is the collective capacity to work together across internal roles, teams, and silos, effectively sharing knowledge and resources to achieve a common purpose.

### **Direction & goal-orientation**

Direction & Goal-Orientation is the collective capacity to co-create and maintain a clear, shared understanding of a common vision and to translate that vision into aligned, actionable goals.

### **Learning**

Learning is the collective capacity to systematically generate, share, and integrate insights from experience, enabling the continuous adaptation and evolution of the group's strategies and practices.

### **Awareness of one's environment**

Awareness of One's Environment is the collective capacity to actively sense, interpret, and respond to feedback from the broader human and more-than-human systems—social, economic, and ecological—in which the group is embedded.

### **Living into purpose & values**

Living into Purpose and Values is the collective capacity to align with the organisation's evolving purpose—its living, unfolding "why"—and to actively bridge that collective direction with the individual purpose of its members, all guided by a clear set of shared values.

## **Diversity, Equity & Inclusion**

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion is the collective capacity to actively cultivate a system where a wide range of human identities and experiences are not only present but are also valued, integrated, and empowered to influence the group's work and culture.

## **Commitment to quality**

Commitment to Quality is the collective capacity to ensure the group's work is relevant, meaningful, and delivered with care, creating a consistently supportive and empowering experience for all participants and partners.

## **External collaboration**

External Collaboration is the collective capacity to build and maintain generative, trust-based relationships with partners, stakeholders, and other actors within the broader ecosystem.

## **Engaging with complexity**

Engaging with Complexity is the collective capacity to embrace change and uncertainty as inherent parts of the work. It involves moving beyond simplistic, linear solutions and instead adopting a proactive stance of experimentation and curiosity to navigate ambiguity, paradox, and emergence when confronted with multifaceted challenges.

## Glossary of key terms and concepts

The following glossary provides definitions for the core concepts that underpin the Capacity Compass and our broader work at Unity Effect. These terms are offered to create a shared language and a deeper understanding of the principles guiding this framework.

**Agency:** The ability of individuals or groups to act with purpose, choice, and influence within their environment. Agency involves both the internal capacity for self-determination and the external conditions that enable or constrain action.

**Capacity:** The inherent or developed ability of an individual or group to perform, adapt, and grow within various contexts.

**Capability:** The demonstrated ability to apply a capacity in a given context, turning potential into action.

**Competency:** A cluster of related skills, knowledge, and abilities that enable effective performance in a specific role or situation.

**Complexity:** A quality of systems composed of many interconnected parts, leading to non-linear and emergent behaviours that cannot be predicted by analysing the components in isolation.

**Development:** The process of growth and transformation over time, which can apply to individuals, teams, and systems. In our context, development is intentional, holistic, and oriented toward increasing capacity and wellbeing.

**Dialogue:** A form of conversation aimed at fostering mutual understanding, where participants suspend judgment and explore shared meaning.

**Embodiment:** The practice of integrating awareness, knowledge, and values into one's physical presence and actions, moving beyond purely cognitive understanding to a state of being.

**Evaluation:** The systematic process of collecting, analysing and assessing information about impact, processes and achievements of a program, project, policy etc..

**Holism:** A perspective that emphasizes the importance of the whole system and the interdependence of its parts, rather than separating them into components.

**Inner Development:** The intentional process of cultivating internal qualities such as self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and resilience, which are foundational for personal growth and effective leadership.

**Leadership:** The capacity to inspire, guide, and support individuals and groups toward a shared purpose, often through distributed and collaborative means.

**Learning:** The continuous process of acquiring new knowledge, skills, and perspectives that leads to changes in understanding and behaviour.

**Living Systems:** A metaphor for understanding organisations and communities as dynamic, adaptive, and interconnected entities, similar to natural ecosystems.

**Mindset:** A set of underlying beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions that shape how an individual perceives and responds to the world.

**Potential:** The raw, latent cognitive, emotional, or physical ability that exists within an individual or group.

**Reflection:** The practice of stepping back to intentionally consider experiences, actions, and assumptions to deepen learning and insight.

**Regeneration:** The practice of creating the conditions for life to thrive by renewing, restoring, and revitalizing systems.

**Regenerative Measurement:** An approach that encourages choosing measurement approaches wisely and sensitive to the context. Measurement can be understood as a regenerative practice that gathers information that can further support and nurture the system.

**Relationality:** A worldview that sees relationships and interconnectedness as the fundamental reality and primary driver of change.

**Skill:** A specific, learned ability to perform a task proficiently, often of a technical or practical nature.

**Systems Thinking:** The ability to see and understand systems as a whole, including the patterns, relationships, and feedback loops that shape their behaviour.

**Transformation:** A fundamental shift in form, structure, or consciousness that leads to a new state of being.

**Wellbeing:** A holistic state of health, flourishing, and vitality that encompasses physical, mental, emotional, and social dimensions.

**Wholeness:** The state of being complete and undivided, where all parts of a system are integrated and work in harmony.