

The ELEVATE Handbook

A practical guide to transcultural learning in teams and organisations

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Declaration

This handbook was developed within the framework of the ELEVATE project (ID: KA220-VET-7F84C457), co-financed by the European Union. The opinions and views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the Spanish Service for the Internationalisation of Education (SEPIE). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

In the preparation of this handbook, a large language model (LLM) was used to support the editing and, to some extent, the drafting of texts. In particular,

the LLM was used to reduce redundancies, improve clarity and consistency, and harmonise the tone and style across the different texts. The authors remain responsible for the content and final version of the publication.

A note on accessibility: This handbook has been designed to be accessible — its structure, headings, colours and formatting follow established accessibility standards, so that it can be read and navigated with the tool each reader happens to use. Removing barriers before they are noticed is itself a small, practical act of the relational thinking this handbook argues for.

Project Partners



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Introduction to this handbook

Welcome to the ELEVATE journey

Welcome, and thank you for opening this handbook. Whether you lead teams across borders, design and deliver intercultural training, research culture and cooperation, or simply care about how people from different backgrounds work well together, you have arrived in the right place. This is not a manual you read once and shelve. Think of it instead as a travelling companion, a resource you return to as your questions change. Culture is not a problem to be solved and then forgotten; it is a living, ongoing part of how we cooperate, and it deserves an approach that keeps growing with us.

ELEVATE (Enhancing Learning and Evaluation for Vocational and Intercultural Training Excellence) is a collaborative project funded by the European Union. It brings together partners from across Europe, including researchers from Spain, France, Germany, Poland and Luxemburg to explore a simple but demanding question: how can we help organisations and their teams deal well with cultural complexity, not as a one-

off event, but as a lasting capability?

Pause and reflect: *Before you read on, take a moment. What brought you to this handbook? How is your work connected to the topics of the Elevate project? Keep it in mind as you go; the pages ahead are meant to connect to it.*

Who is this handbook for?

This handbook is written for the wide community of people who support developing others and manage diversity in real, everyday settings. You do not need a particular title to benefit from it. You need only the wish to help people cooperate better across cultures.

You will find this handbook especially useful if you are one of the following:

- ✓ Businesspeople and leaders – managers, HR and L&D professionals, and team leads who work in international, multicultural, or simply diverse environments and search for practical ways to strengthen cooperation.
- ✓ Intercultural trainers and facilitators – practitioners who design and deliver learning experiences and are looking for frameworks, exercises, and

methods that create genuine, lasting change rather than one-off awareness.

- ✓ Academics, educators, and researchers – including vocational education and training (VET) professionals who want to connect solid theory with hands-on practice and raise the quality standards of the field.

The tools and resources here are designed to serve both experienced practitioners and newcomers, large corporations and small enterprises and startups, public institutions and private organisations. Wherever you sit on that map, you will find something you can use tomorrow, and ideas worth returning to over the longer run.

Pause and reflect: *Which of these roles feels closest to yours? And which of the others do you regularly work alongside? Some of the most valuable moments in this handbook come from reading it through more than one pair of eyes.*

What to expect?

This handbook is practice oriented. It blends a clear conceptual foundation with concrete tools you can put to work, so that ideas do not stay on

the page. Its structure guides you through the ELEVATE journey: from understanding why a shift is needed, to preparing and facilitating learning, and sustaining change over time.

Beginning with the foundations:

The first part explores why intercultural training needs a shift in perspective and what the transcultural approach adds to the field. It brings together accessible conceptual foundations, a short overview of relevant research, perspectives from the ELEVATE Advisory Board, and reflections on the benefits for organisations and teams. It also introduces the role of the facilitator in translating ideas into meaningful learning processes.

Setting the stage for learning: The second part focuses on the start of the ELEVATE process for teams and organizations. It introduces the Self-Assessment Tool and explains its purpose, structure, and responsible use. Practical guidance, examples, and experiences from the pilots will show how the tool can be implemented in different organisational contexts and how teams can prepare for transcultural learning.

Moving into the learning journey:

The third part presents the ELEVATE learning path and its different stages, from preparation and design to facilitation and reflection. It includes practical methods, exercises, cases, and pilot experiences that can be adapted to different teams and organisations. It also connects readers to the wider ELEVATE toolbox, including the AI-assisted web application, tailored learning paths, and further open-access resources.

Looking beyond the intervention:

The final part explores how transcultural learning can be sustained over time. It considers how organisations can observe longer-term effects, anchor learning in everyday practice, and adapt or scale the ELEVATE approach. It also brings together transferable lessons and outlooks from the project.

Across these parts, you can expect:

- Clear foundations – an accessible explanation of the transcultural learning approach and why it matters, written in plain language rather than academic jargon.
- Frameworks and methods – structured ways of thinking about cultural complexity that

you can adapt to your own context.

- Exercises and best practices – activities, cases, and proven methodologies for delivering meaningful competence development.
- A bridge to the wider ELEVATE toolkit – including a research-based self-assessment tool, an AI-assisted web application and tailored learning paths, the handbook connects to living and adaptive open-access resources.

A short word on language: Two terms appear throughout, and it helps to hold them lightly.

“Intercultural” competence is the broad, familiar field: helping people work across cultures. The “transcultural” approach is the particular lens ELEVATE brings to that field. We explain the difference simply in the sections that follow; for now, it is enough to know that both point toward the same goal: cooperation that works.

Pause and reflect: *In your organisation, is transcultural competence treated as an occasional event, or as an ongoing capability? What would change if it were seen as strategic?*

What is the mission of ELEVATE?

In a world marked by growing cultural diversity, global mobility, and social polarisation, transcultural competence is no longer a nice-to-have soft skill. It is a vital capacity for building inclusive, resilient, and effective organisations and teams. Against this backdrop, ELEVATE envisions a world where transcultural competence is cultivated through deep and ongoing learning processes, not isolated workshops or tick-box activities. We believe the field needs a transformative shift to achieve meaningful, sustainable change, and our mission is to make that shift practical. By the close of the project in September 2026, ELEVATE aims to contribute to:

- ✓ Raise the quality standards of intercultural training in vocational education and training, and beyond.
- ✓ Promote transcultural competence as a strategic priority for inclusive leadership and workplace wellbeing.
- ✓ Foster a European community of practice that connects research, education, business, and civil society.

To get there, ELEVATE develops an interlinked set of resources: research into how organisations actually build intercultural

competence today, a self-assessment tool that lets an organisation audit its own strengths and gaps, an AI-assisted web application for adaptive and personalised learning, and this handbook for the trainers and professionals who bring it all to life.

Pause and reflect: *As you move through the handbook, keep asking one working question: how would this look in my setting, with my people, on a normal Tuesday? The approach only comes alive when you translate it into your own reality.*

Why is a shift needed in how we address cultural diversity?

Much of the established work on cultural diversity begins from difference. It maps how national cultures vary, sorts people into dimensions and categories, and prepares us for the gaps we are likely to meet. This work has value; awareness of difference is a useful starting point, and it has helped many people avoid needless misunderstandings.

But a difference-first approach carries a quiet risk. When we lead with what separates us, we can end up reinforcing the very boundaries we hoped to bridge. People become representatives of

their categories rather than individuals. Differences start to look like fixed, prohibitive problems. And crucially, this framing tells us little about the practical question every diverse team actually faces: not “how are we different?” but “how do we cooperate together?” Shared practices, not in abstract terms, but in concrete and specific settings, is what really happens, as teams are getting things done to achieve their goals.

Two further pressures make a shift urgent. First, our reality is more complex than national labels suggest. Any one person carries many cultural belongings at once, professional, generational, organisational, regional – so treating culture as a single national box no longer fits how people really are. Second, isolated training events rarely stick. A one-day workshop can raise awareness, but competence grows through practice and relationships over time, not through a single sitting.

The invitation, then, is to change the point of departure. Instead of asking first what divides us, ELEVATE asks what we can strengthen and build *between* us that connects us. Acknowledging cultural difference remains a

useful starting point, not a prohibitive problem, but the energy moves toward discovering and developing commonalities: the shared interests, tasks, and goals that make cooperation possible even when values and backgrounds diverge.

Pause and reflect: *Think of a time cooperation across cultures genuinely worked for you. Was it the differences you had catalogued that made it succeed, or something you found in common, a shared task, a shared purpose, a shared willingness to figure it out together?*

What is the invitation of a transcultural approach?

A transcultural approach reframes cultural complexity as a resource rather than an obstacle. Rooted in the idea of relational economics developed within the Transcultural Caravan Network (Wieland 2020; Baumann Montecinos, Grünfelder & Wieland 2023), it does not ask us to ignore differences or to melt them into sameness. It asks us to focus on the relationships and commonalities through which people actually create value together.

At its heart are a few simple shifts:

- From difference to commonalities – we still see differences, but we lead with what people share and can build on together.
- From categories to relationships – competence lives not inside individuals as a stock of facts about other cultures, but between people, in the quality of their cooperation.
- From identity to belonging – people do not need to share the same values or identity to work well together; they can share interests and a sense of belonging to a common endeavour, giving their best to create something together.
- From events to ongoing learning – transcultural competence grows through practice and experience, often within long-term communities of practice, rather than in one-off sessions.

This is why transcultural learning is described as relational. It is less about accumulating knowledge of “other” cultures and more about developing the willingness and the ability to cooperate in a complex web of relationships. A helpful starting point, as researchers in this tradition note, is shared professional culture: most

professions worldwide hold enough in common to begin cooperating and learning together, whatever the national or personal differences in the room (Sackmann 2023, Baumann Montecinos 2022).

That is the invitation this handbook extends to you. Not to discard what you already know about intercultural work, but to shift the centre of gravity, from mapping distance to building bridges, from managing difference to enabling cooperation. The chapters ahead offer the concepts, methods, and exercises to help you do exactly that, in your own context and with your own people.

Pause and reflect: *As you turn to the first chapter, hold one question close: where, in your work, could a focus on commonalities and relationships open a door that a focus on difference has kept closed? That is where your ELEVATE journey begins.*

Part I

Understand: research, vision, and purpose of ELEVATE

Chapter 1: Foundations and research

What to expect in this chapter: This chapter introduces ELEVATE's central proposition: transcultural competence is not simply something individuals possess, but something people enact together and organisations enable. You will explore why established approaches—from country-comparison frameworks and individual competence models to assessment tools and DEIB perspectives—remain useful, while also considering where they fall short when identities, relationships and working contexts are complex. The chapter then turns to the relational shift at the heart of ELEVATE. You will learn how culturally complex situations can be approached through a cyclical process of mapping assumptions and constraints, bridging different perspectives, and integrating learning into shared practices. You will also consider how competence can be assessed through reflection, partner feedback and evidence from real interactions. Finally, the focus moves from isolated training to organisational capability. You will examine how strategy, processes, everyday practices, leadership and organisational memory can create conditions in which productive cooperation becomes more likely – and learning can travel beyond the people and situations where it began.

1.1 Setting the stage

International work is often described as a challenge of “dealing with cultural differences”.

However, this description is only partly useful. It can alert teams to

differing expectations, but it can also encourage people to explain behaviour too quickly through nationality: “They communicate like that because they are from country X, Y or Z”. ELEVATE's desk research concludes that organisations need a more

precise and more useful starting point. Culture is not a fixed national package carried by each employee. Instead, it is a changing set of shared habits, meanings and expectations linked to many groups: professions, functions, organisations, generations, languages, regions, digital communities and nations. People belong to several of these groups at once, and the importance of each identity changes from one situation to another.

This matters because the main business problem is rarely a lack of facts about another country. The problem is more often that people with different assumptions must coordinate work, make decisions, handle disagreement and build trust under real constraints. A finance specialist in Paris and an engineer in Warsaw may differ because of professional training, status, incentives, language confidence, local regulations or previous experience—not simply because they are French or Polish. Useful support must therefore begin with the actual relationship and task, rather than a national profile.

1.2 The central ELEVATE proposition

ELEVATE adopts a relational and transcultural approach. Its aim is not merely to help individuals adapt to pre-defined differences. It is to help people and organisations deliberately create new common ground: shared meanings, workable routines and forms of cooperation that did not exist beforehand. Competence is therefore not treated as a personal possession—something an employee either has or lacks. It is visible in what people can achieve together, in a particular context, and in whether organisational conditions make constructive collaboration more likely.

In practical terms, this changes the question that organisations are asking from: “How culturally competent are our employees?” to: “In which relationships does cultural complexity affect our work? What helps or blocks cooperation there? What shared practices could we develop? What specific practices have our teams adopted when working together? How can we retain and spread what the people involved and the whole team learn?”

The [full report](#), available from the ELEVATE project website, draws on

more than 80 academic sources and reviews dominant competence models and assessment tools. Survey and interview work across France, Germany, Luxembourg, Poland and Spain confirms a practical gap: organisations recognise the importance of cultural diversity, but frequently address it through informal actions, isolated training or compliance measures rather than through strategy, work processes and learning systems. The relational approach offers a route from good intentions to organisational capability.

1.3 What earlier approaches contribute and where they fall short

The desk research does not dismiss established approaches as each addresses a genuine need. ELEVATE's choice is to retain their useful elements while avoiding assumptions that become limiting when organisations face fluid identities, hybrid work, multidisciplinary teams and long-term collaboration. The following provides a brief overview of these approaches and models.

Country-comparison

approaches: Models comparing national cultures can give newcomers a vocabulary for

discussing possible differences in hierarchy, communication, time or decision-making. They may be useful as hypotheses or conversation starters. However, their weakness appears when averages are treated as descriptions of individuals. This can hide differences within countries, reinforce stereotypes and lead managers to overlook factors that are more relevant in the situation. Knowing a national tendency does not tell a team what a particular colleague means, how power shapes the exchange, or what will work in this relationship.

Individual competence models:

Many models describe intercultural competence through knowledge, attitudes and skills—for example curiosity, empathy, flexibility, perspective-taking and communication ability. These qualities remain valuable. However, a checklist can imply that competence sits inside one person and transfers automatically from one setting to another. In reality, a person may collaborate effectively in one team and struggle in another. Competence is partly judged by others and depends on the task, relationships, language, authority and organisational climate.

Developmental and stage

models: Stage models suggest that people can move from limited awareness towards more complex engagement with difference. They are useful for showing that development takes time. Yet they can overstate a smooth, one-directional progression and offer limited guidance on how change occurs in everyday work. Employees do not permanently “graduate” into competence; they continue to encounter unfamiliar situations and may respond differently under pressure.

Psychometric tests and self-

assessments: Assessment tools can support reflection and identify learning needs. The report nevertheless warns that no single instrument can measure the full complexity of intercultural competence. Self-reports may capture intentions or preferred behaviours rather than actual collaboration. Standard scores may also remove the very context that determines whether conduct is effective and appropriate. Tools are most useful when combined with discussion, observation, peer feedback and evidence from specific interactions.

DEIB and organisational

approaches: Diversity, equity,

inclusion and belonging approaches add essential attention to representation, fairness, access and power. Organisational culture and cultural-intelligence models also show that policies, leadership and systems matter. ELEVATE builds on these contributions. However, since representation and inclusion do not automatically produce cooperation, learning or innovation, organisations should also examine how diverse actors create meaning, resolve tensions and develop shared practices through work itself.

These different approaches, with their respective contributions and limitations, as well as indications of how ELEVATE relates to them, are resumed in *table 1.1*.

ELEVATE’s conclusion is therefore not “replace everything with a new label”. It is a change in emphasis: use cultural knowledge cautiously; retain useful personal capabilities; recognise power and structural inequality; but assess and develop competence through concrete relationships, processes and organisational conditions. This makes the approach less susceptible to stereotyping and more closely connected to performance and to the real-life complexity that many teams face on a daily basis.

Approach	Contributions	Risks	ELEVATE's position	Selection of related academic works (see the list of references at the end of this chapter)
Country comparisons	Vocabulary for discussing differences in hierarchy, communication, time, decision-making.	Averages mistaken for individuals; hides within-country variation and reinforces stereotypes.	Useful as a question, not an answer – it can't say what a colleague means or how power shapes the exchange.	Hofstede, 1991; Trompenaars & Hampden Turner, 1993; House et al., 2004; Meyer, 2014.
Individual competence models	Name valuable qualities: e.g. curiosity, empathy, flexibility, perspective-taking.	Imply competence sits in one person and transfers automatically between settings.	Competence is relational – judged by others, dependent on task, language, authority and climate.	Fantini, 2009; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009; Dunne, 2011; Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017.
Developmental / stage models	Show that development takes time.	Overstate smooth, one-directional progress; little guidance for everyday work.	No one "graduates" – unfamiliar situations recur, and pressure changes responses.	Lysgaard, 1955; Bennett, 1986; Lane, 2012.
Tests and self-assessments	Support reflection; identify learning needs.	Capture intentions rather than actual collaboration; scores strip out decisive context.	One input among several, alongside discussion, observation and peer feedback.	Chen & Starosta, 2000; Matveev, 2002; Ang & Inkpen, 2008; Fantini, 2009; Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017.
DEIB and organisational approaches	Attention to representation, fairness, access, power; systems and leadership matter.	Inclusion does not automatically produce cooperation, learning or innovation.	Builds on these, adding how diverse actors make meaning and develop shared practices through the work itself.	Distefano & Maznevski, 2000; Shore et al., 2009; Shemla & Meyer, 2012; Sanchez-Apellaniz, & Triguero-Sánchez, 2017; Gibson, 2021.

Table 1.1: Foundational approaches to intercultural competence and diversity management in organisations

Pause and reflect: *Think of an intercultural model or assessment tool you have used. What did it help you see—and what might it have hidden about the particular people, relationships, power dynamics and working context involved? What would change if you treated its findings as a starting point for inquiry rather than as a conclusion?*

1.4 The relational shift: competence is something people enact together

The distinctive feature of the ELEVATE approach is its focus of attention. Traditional approaches usually begin with the individual: what a manager knows, believes or can do. A relational approach begins with an event or ongoing relationship in which people must achieve something together. Examples include a virtual project meeting, a handover between sites, an international recruitment process, a supplier negotiation, the integration of a new colleague, a disagreement over quality standards or the design of a service for several markets. Starting from these situations prevents the organisation from assuming in advance which cultural categories matter. National background may be

relevant, but so may professional identity, language, seniority, gender, organisational history, local regulation or the unequal distribution of decision-making power. The people involved influence one another, interpret each other's actions and gradually establish what is normal, acceptable and effective in that relationship.

1.5 What “transcultural competence” means in practice

Transcultural competence is the ability and willingness of people or organisations to create new commonalities in culturally complex settings (Grünfelder & Baumann Montecinos 2025). “Commonality” does not mean making everyone the same or asking minority members to assimilate. It means developing enough shared meaning and coordinated action to work productively while differences remain. The outcome might be a new meeting rule, a shared vocabulary, an agreed decision protocol, a redesigned onboarding practice or a jointly owned quality standard.

This approach reframes diversity from a condition to be managed into material for collective learning. Instead of asking one side to adapt to the other, participants explore what each perspective makes visible and construct a workable third option.

The relationship itself has value: people do not need complete agreement to identify a constructive next step, cooperate for mutual benefit and learn from the process.

Against this backdrop, the ELEVATE Learning Journey is cyclical rather than linear. A team may integrate a new practice and later need to remap the situation when membership, technology, markets or priorities change. This is why ELEVATE treats competence development as continuous learning rather than a one-off transfer of knowledge.

1.6 Why context matters for assessment

Those taking part in an interaction are best placed to judge whether it was effective and appropriate.

Assessment should therefore combine structured reflection with feedback from relevant partners and evidence of outcomes. Useful questions include: Did people understand the decision? Were concerns raised safely? Did the group use several perspectives? Was a workable common practice created? Did the learning remain local, or was it captured and shared?

Pause and reflect: *Think of a recent situation in which people with different perspectives had to achieve something together. What did they need to map, bridge and integrate—and what factors seemed to help them succeed? If no new common ground emerged, where did the process stall?*

CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATION · THE RELATIONAL PARADIGM

What else constitutes a relationship?

For those interested in further conceptual information, this box offers to explore the relational shift in more depth.

What is the relational paradigm?

In a nutshell, the relational paradigm argues that relations precede entities – such as individuals, organizations, or companies. Rather than treating entities as isolated and self-contained, it encourages us to focus on the relational processes and interactions that give rise to and shape them. So, a relational understanding of competence shifts attention from the individual to the relationships and contexts in which people – and goes even one step further: relational ontologies hold that the nature and properties of individuals and collectives are themselves constituted through their relations with other entities and with their environments (Grünfelder & Baumann Montecinos, 2025). In other words, a relationship is not something that happens between two ready-made parties. **It is part of what makes them what they are.**

That raises a question the section above did not reach. **If competence is enacted in relationships, what – beyond the people involved – is part of, constitutes and shapes those relationships?**

What counts as a relation?

Josef Wieland (2020) draws a distinction between relations and mere connections: Coordinating two people's activities, or exchanging two goods, can produce a connection in which nothing about the participants changes. A relation, properly speaking, describes an interactive process between two or more agents or events in which the character of those involved is to some extent transformed (Baumann Montecinos et al., 2025). This is why the **relational event**, rather than the actor alone, becomes the relevant unit of analysis – and why the situations listed above are the right place to start.

What else constitutes in a relationship?

Teams collaborate through languages, rooms, platforms, documents, trackers and, increasingly, AI-supported tools. If competence emerges through relations, these are not neutral backgrounds against which relationships happen. They shape what can be said, what gets recorded, what remains visible, and to whom.

Karen Barad captures the broader position in a compact formulation: *relata* do not pre-exist relations. In plainer terms, the things that stand in a relationship are not fully formed before the relationship exists – an individual, a team or a technological system cannot be understood independently of the relations through which it comes into being (Barad, 2003). Carlo Rovelli (2021) reaches a related conclusion from quantum physics, describing events not as things but as nodes in a relational process. Milton Bennett (2020) draws the corresponding implication for culture: culture is not simply something we have, but something we do.

Bayo Akomolafe extends this through the example of a conversation disrupted by technology. What co-creates the communicative moment is not only the people involved but the technology, the glitches, the laptop and the speaker. The ecology itself participates in what happens (Grünfelder & Baumann Montecinos, 2025). In organisational settings, this offers a useful way of looking at teams whose collaboration is carried through tools and environments they may not have designed and rarely examine.

What does this not mean?

It is not transhumanism. The concern is not about technologically enhancing or replacing human beings. It is with describing more accurately the conditions through which collaboration already takes place. **It does not diminish human responsibility.** Decentring the individual widens where responsibility is understood to lie. If a tool shapes what a team notices, records or makes possible, then choosing, designing and periodically reviewing that tool becomes part of the work – not a technical matter to be delegated elsewhere.

What does it change in practice?

The relational lens opens one further diagnostic question for organisations. Alongside “in which relationships does cultural complexity actually matter for us?”, it becomes possible to ask: **What does that relationship pass through, and how does it shape what the people involved can do together?**

Pause and reflect: *Think of a relationship your organisation depends on – with a team on another site, a supplier, a client. What does it actually pass through? Which platform, which language, which form, which meeting format? Who chose those, and when were they last reviewed by anyone thinking about the quality of the relationship rather than the efficiency of the process?*

1.7 Moving from individual training to organisational capability

A skilled employee can still fail in a system that rewards speed over dialogue, centralises decisions, excludes certain language groups

or repeatedly changes teams without transferring learning. Conversely, well-designed structures can help people behave more competently even when they have limited international experience. ELEVATE therefore treats organisational transcultural competence as the capacity to make productive relational behaviour more likely and to learn from it over time.

Three levels for organisational action: The project's emerging self-assessment logic distinguishes purpose and strategy, processes, and everyday practices. These levels prevent cultural competence from being confined to HR or occasional training.

Purpose and Strategy

Clarify why culturally complex cooperation matters to the organization. Link it to customer value, innovation, risk, talent, partnerships and social responsibility. Give leaders explicit responsibility and define the relationships where failure or improvement would have strategic consequences.

Processes

Examine recruitment, onboarding, project governance, meetings, decision-making, conflict handling, knowledge management, performance review and supplier or client engagement. Identify where these processes enable or obstruct mutual learning and shared meaning.

Practices

Focus on repeated behaviour in real work – how people ask questions, explain assumptions, translate specialist language, distribute speaking time, respond to disagreement, test understanding, record decisions and revisit working agreements.

Learning must be embedded in work: Traditional workshops can introduce concepts and create space for reflection, but sustainable development requires opportunities to practise, receive feedback and adjust behaviour in relevant relationships. ELEVATE therefore favours a learning ecosystem rather than a stand-alone course. This may combine short inputs with facilitated team reflection, peer exchange, project reviews, coaching, guided experiments and digital resources. The objective is transfer: learning should change how work is organised and performed.

Organisations need memory, not only trained individuals: When a team solves a recurring coordination problem, the insight often remains with the individuals involved. It is lost when they leave the project ends. A relational approach asks how learning can become an organisational resource. Teams can document new routines, integrate them into onboarding, share cases across units, adjust templates or governance rules, and create communities of practice. This turns local success into a capability that others can adapt rather than copy mechanically.

Leadership creates the conditions: Relational leadership is not simply being open-minded. It means creating legitimate time and space for clarification, recognising unequal positions, showing curiosity, protecting constructive challenge and helping people connect differences to a shared purpose. Leaders also shape whether mistakes become blame events or learning events. Their behaviour signals whether co-creation is expected or whether employees should simply conform to established norms.

Pause and reflect: *Think of a time when culturally complex cooperation succeeded in your organisation. Did the organisation's structures make that success more likely, or did the people involved succeed despite them? What could change-in strategy, processes or everyday practices-to help others build on what they learned?*

1.8 Concrete value for organisations and multicultural teams

The transcultural approach adds value because it connects cultural complexity directly to work outcomes. It does not promise that diversity automatically creates innovation or that every

conflict has a cultural cause. Instead, it helps organisations identify where diverse perspectives are being lost, where coordination is breaking down and where new common ground could improve performance.

More accurate diagnosis: National explanations can be quick but misleading. By mapping a specific relationship, teams distinguish cultural assumptions from process failures, unclear authority, technical disagreement, language barriers or resource constraints. This reduces stereotyping and allows interventions to target the actual cause. A recurring “communication problem”, for example, may be a decision-rights problem that becomes visible only when participants compare their expectations.

Better collaboration and decision quality: Teams that make assumptions discussable can identify misunderstandings earlier, combine specialised knowledge and make decisions that participants understand and support. Bridging practices—such as checking interpretations, rotating facilitation or making disagreement procedures explicit—reduce avoidable friction. Integrating differences can produce a process or solution

better suited to several sites, professions or customer groups.

Stronger inclusion and belonging:

Representation is important, but people experience inclusion through relationships and participation. A relational assessment asks whose interpretation counts, who can challenge a proposal, whose language proficiency affects status and whether shared practices are genuinely co-created. This complements DEIB metrics by examining the quality of interaction and the practical possibility of belonging without requiring sameness.

Innovation and adaptive

capacity: The transcultural objective is not simply tolerance. It is the creation of new commonalities and actions from heterogeneous experience. This can improve product adaptation, service design, problem-solving and partnership development. Because teams learn how to construct workable arrangements rather than memorise fixed cultural rules, they are also better prepared for new markets, technologies, stakeholders and forms of work.

Reduced risk and more resilient relationships: Misunderstood

expectations can damage safety, quality, compliance, retention and client trust. Focusing on critical relational events allows organisations to identify risks before they become systemic. It also develops the capacity to repair relationships: participants can revisit assumptions, renegotiate routines and preserve cooperation without pretending that disagreement has disappeared.

More meaningful evaluation:

ELEVATE recommends measuring collaboration, not only demographic diversity or completion of training. Indicators can include the inclusiveness of decisions, the quality of cross-unit handovers, the number of improvements co-designed across sites, trust and psychological safety, conflict-resolution outcomes, retention in diverse teams, and evidence that learning has changed organisational processes. Quantitative data remain useful, but should be interpreted alongside feedback, observation and cases from real work.

The desk research was backed up with a survey of organisations and trainers working internationally. Its findings suggest that while many respondents saw cultural diversity

as valuable, formal assessment was uncommon and full strategic integration was rare.

Organisations were interested in practical, affordable and scalable tools. A relational self-assessment can meet this need by identifying strengths and next steps without reducing competence to a single score or claiming that one model fits every organisation.

1.9 A practical route for organisations

The relational approach can be introduced without launching a large transformation programme. The most credible starting point is a small number of relationships (e.g. teams, departments...) that are strategically important, and which may appear to experience recurrent difficulties. Top management can also be a good place to start. The aim is to learn through action and progressively connect local improvements to organisational systems.

Questions for leadership teams:

- Do our diversity and internationalisation strategies develop new common ground, or mainly acknowledge differences?
- Which cross-boundary relationships are most important to our strategy, and

how do we know whether they work well?

- Are employees expected to adapt individually, or do our structures and routines also change through learning?
- Can people raise different interpretations safely, particularly when status and language proficiency are unequal?
- How do we capture successful relational practices and make them available beyond one team?
- Do our indicators assess representation and training activity only, or also collaboration, belonging, shared purpose and value creation?

In a nutshell: Chapter 1 has presented the key thinking behind the ELEVATE project, based on desk research and surveys carried out by the project team. It provides some key definitions and insights into the vision promoted by the project and the tools, underlining how they can be useful for organisations.

ELEVATE does not define competence as knowing how “other cultures” behave. It defines it as the organisational ability to create conditions in which people and teams can relate, learn and construct effective action together. This is a more demanding approach because it cannot be delivered through a simple national checklist or a one-off workshop. It is also more practical: it addresses the actual relationships through which strategy is implemented, knowledge is combined, conflict is handled and value is created.

For organisations, the shift can be summarised in three movements: from categorising people to examining relationships; from training individuals to shaping learning systems; and from managing difference to developing new commonalities. The result is not cultural uniformity. It is a stronger capacity to cooperate across differences that remain real, changing and sometimes challenging.

Chapter 2: The vision and purpose of ELEVATE

What to expect in this chapter: [Chapter 1](#) sets out what the research shows: that comparing national cultures tells a team very little about what will actually work between these particular people, in this particular piece of work. Against this backdrop, this chapter states what ELEVATE proposes instead.

It begins with why ELEVATE exists and what it is for, then shows how each commitment of the transcultural approach turns into a design decision in the Learning Journey.

It defines transcultural competence and the idea at its centre, commonalities – and it draws one distinction that shapes everything that follows: Commonalities can be found: this refers to what people already share. They can also be developed: shared meanings and practices a team builds that did not exist before. Both matter, and ELEVATE deliberately puts its weight on the second. That emphasis determines what a facilitator does in the room.

It also sets out the transcultural learning process on which the Learning Path is built, so that the four stages you will meet in [Part 3](#) arrive as the application of a model rather than as a sequence of workshop modules. By the end of this chapter you will be able to say what transcultural competence means at individual, team and organisational level, recognise a commonality when a team builds one, explain how commonalities develop, and answer a sceptical colleague who thinks this is another call for everyone to get along.

2.1 Why ELEVATE exists

Something has shifted in what teams actually need, and it is not that cultural difference has become more or less important. It is that difference has become harder to locate.

Teams today rarely differ along a single dimension. Nationality, profession, organisational culture,

language, generation, educational background, disciplinary expertise, personal identity and individual life history all meet in the same room – and each one matters differently depending on the task at hand. Knowing which of them is doing the work in any given misunderstanding is rarely obvious, and often it is none of them.

At the same time, every team builds a culture of its own. Through repeated interaction it develops shared expectations, informal norms, rituals and ways of working that shape how people behave with one another. These are not applied uniformly. Behaviour shifts with the task, the relationships, the power dynamics, the emotional climate, the language being used, whatever reorganisation happens to be under way. Team culture is not fixed and not homogeneous; it is continuously made and remade.

This is the premise ELEVATE starts from: A team is not a collection of individuals from different backgrounds. It is a living social system that continuously constructs and reconstructs its own ways of working.

This changes the question worth asking. Not how are we different? – a question that can be answered at length without anything improving – but:

How can we collaborate effectively despite, and because of, our differences?

Answering that takes more than knowledge about cultures. It takes the capacity to observe how the team itself works, notice the patterns it is producing, understand how context shapes behaviour, and deliberately shape new ways of working together. That capacity is what this handbook calls transcultural competence, and developing it is what ELEVATE is for.

2.2 What ELEVATE is for

Purpose

ELEVATE exists to develop the collective capability of teams to transform diversity into sustainable collaboration. It is not a collection of exercises, and it is not an intercultural training programme. It is a structured and ongoing process through which a team learns to observe itself, build shared practices, and keep improving them after the facilitator has gone.

The ELEVATE Learning Journey is designed to achieve three things:

Aim	What it looks like when it works
Cultural self-awareness, individually and as a team	People notice their own assumptions, and the team can describe its own patterns of interaction without blaming individuals for them.
Trust	Uncomfortable things get said. Mistakes get used for learning. Asking for help costs nothing and becomes a strengths.
Growth and resilience	The team keeps to its agreed ways of working when under pressure, recovers from setbacks faster, and reviews <i>how</i> it works rather than only what it delivers. Thus, it continuously develops its collaborative practices and collective capacity to keep learning together.

Pause and reflect: *In your organisation, what counts as evidence that a learning intervention worked? If the answer is a feedback form, what would you have to start noticing instead?*

Organisations, technologies and expectations will go on changing, new forms of diversity will emerge, and any specific practice a team builds this year will eventually need replacing next year. A team that can reflect collectively and redesign its own ways of working is better placed for that than a

team holding a good set of practices it does not know how to revise. This is also why success is measured differently here. Not by how satisfied people are at the end of a session, but by **whether the team is still doing something differently three months later** – and whether it can say what.

2.3 How this connects to the transcultural approach

The transcultural approach is not background theory that ELEVATE happens to cite. Each of its commitments turns into a specific

design decision, and it is worth seeing them side by side –

because it explains why the sessions are built as they are.

The transcultural approach holds that...	...so ELEVATE
the unit of analysis is not “culture” or “cultural difference” but the relation – specific, situated, changing	works on the team’s actual patterns of interaction within one chosen practice, not on the national cultures present in the room
commonalities , not differences, are the reference point of cooperation	has teams build shared practices they will keep using, rather than catalogue the ways they differ
commonalities develop through shared experience and sensemaking ; they cannot be issued as policy	combines facilitated dialogue with experimentation in real work, then brings the experience back for reflection
cooperation needs relational spaces that are deliberately created and maintained	treats the facilitated sessions and the ELEVATE E-Learning Space as such spaces – and aims for the team to create them without a facilitator
cultural differences are resources to be related , not problems to be reduced	keeps difference intact. Nobody is asked to adapt to anyone
the goal is the continuity of cooperation – not harmony, not consensus	measures success by sustained practice over time, not by satisfaction at the end
commonalities lower the cost of cooperating over time	focuses on the small, repeated practices that make coordination more effective and thus “cheaper”: e.g., how decisions get recorded, how feedback happens, how newcomers are brought in, etc.

Read down the right-hand column and a pattern appears: every choice moves attention from what people are to what people are doing together, and what they could do differently. That is the whole of the transcultural approach in practice.

One consequence is worth stating plainly, because it surprises people. The aim is not a harmonious team. The transcultural approach is explicit that developing commonalities may generate tension and challenge teams to stretch their comfort zones – that is often where learning, creativity and better practice come from. What ELEVATE aims at is a team that can keep cooperating through disagreement, not one that has stopped disagreeing.

2.4 What we mean by transcultural competence

Transcultural competence

Transcultural competence is the willingness and capability of individuals, teams and organisations to develop new commonalities – shared meanings and shared practices – beyond existing ones, while maintaining and respecting cultural diversity (Grünfelder & Baumann Montecinos, 2023). In a team, this competence unfolds in ongoing processes of recognising and

drawing on its differences, identifying shared needs, co-creating shared meanings and practices, and embedding them in everyday ways of working – thereby fostering trust and resilience that leads to sustainable change without erasing diversity. Three words in that sentence are doing real work.

Willingness comes before capability. Most teams that collaborate badly across differences are not short of skill. They are short of the intention to build something together, or they have never treated it as their job.

Develop: Transcultural competence is not a possession. It is the capability to *produce* what a team needs. A team does not have transcultural competence in the way it has a shared calendar; it has the capacity to keep co-creating the agreements, habits and vocabulary that let it work.

While maintaining diversity: Nobody is asked to give anything up. This is not a polite caveat – it is the condition that makes the approach usable in teams where the differences are real and the disagreements matter.

Furthermore, this definition describes broader capabilities that both shape and develop

throughout the ELEVATE journey. The ELEVATE E-Learning Space ([Part 3, Chapter 9](#)) organises these capabilities into three modules: **Team Self-Awareness, Trust, and Resilience & Growth.** Together, these modules provide the developmental framework for the ELEVATE Learning Path ([Part 3, Chapter 7](#)).

Finally, this transcultural competence definition follows the transcultural approach developed within the Transcultural Caravan Network (Wieland 2020; Baumann Montecinos et al, 2023). The term *transculturación* itself originates with Fernando Ortiz (1940), writing about Cuban colonial history, and was further developed in European scholarship by Wolfgang Welsch (1999).

Pause and reflect: *Think of a recent misunderstanding in a team you work with. Was the problem really that people came from different backgrounds - or that the team had never agreed how it makes decisions, gives feedback, or signals disagreement?*

2.5 Commonalities: to be found, and developed

A commonality is a shared meaning or practice that people deliberately (and unintentionally)

develop in interaction, and which lets them work well together while their differences may remain. The term carries two possible readings, and both are real. Commonalities can be found. People already share a great deal - the need to be trusted, to be respected, to understand and be understood, to have some say over their own work. Teams also usually share more than they are aware of: habits that have grown up without anyone naming them, assumptions that turn out to be held in common once someone asks. Finding these matters, and it is where a team's confidence to keep going often comes from.

Commonalities can also be

developed: These are the shared meanings and practices a team makes that did not exist beforehand - and they can be almost anything: a meeting rule, a shared vocabulary, an agreed decision protocol, a redesigned handover.

The philosopher François Jullien (2009) sets out the same two readings. "The common" can mean the bottom of a box: what is left once everything has been taken out, once the differences between people have been abstracted away. Or it can mean a spring - a source that is

endlessly usable and shapeable, where the common lies in the **ability to keep developing** rather than in any condition that existed beforehand. Jullien argues that the common lies essentially in the second.

ELEVATE follows that emphasis, without discarding the first: The practical reason is straightforward: what a team happens to already share is limited by circumstance, and it runs out. What a team can develop does not. A team with little in common is not short of raw material, because the material is the interaction rather than the overlap. This emphasis matters because of where teams tend to stop. Discovering that we are more alike than we thought is a pleasant conversation, but on its own it changes nothing on Monday morning. The change comes when a team makes something it did not have before. There is also no ceiling: a team that has built four shared practices can build a fifth. Nobody graduates.

This is why the ELEVATE Learning Path moves in the order it does. The stages Recognise and Connect are largely about finding – surfacing what is already present in the team, including the

human needs its members turn out to share. Elevate and Implement with Impact are about developing what is not yet there. Teams find before they build, and the finding is what makes the building possible.

An example: A team has two feedback cultures. Half the members were trained to say what is wrong directly; the others were trained that criticising a colleague in front of others is a failure of respect. Both are coherent. Both are held sincerely.

There are three ways this can go:

Uniformity: one norm wins. Usually the majority's, or the manager's. The others adapt, quietly, and stop offering much.

Avoidance: nobody raises anything difficult. The team is polite and slowly stops improving.

A new commonality: the team builds a third practice that belonged to nobody beforehand. Written comments circulate first; the discussion happens afterwards, with the author having had time to read. The direct communicators still say what they think. The others are no longer put on the spot. **The practice is new, it is theirs, and it did not exist in either original culture.**

Transcultural Learning Process	ELEVATE stage	What the team is doing
1. Recognition of cultural complexity	RECOGNISE	Seeing the range of perspectives, roles, expertise and expectations actually present – and the team’s own patterns of interaction – without judging them or explaining them by nationality.
2. Identification of existing commonalities	CONNECT	Finding what the team already shares, including the human needs its members turn out to have in common.
3. Development of new commonalities	ELEVATE	Building shared practices that did not exist before.
4. The cycle continues	IMPLEMENT WITH IMPACT	New practices become routine, produce new experience, and the process continues to unfold.

That third outcome is what the ELEVATE Learning Path is designed to produce. It is also why a facilitator does not need to know anything about the national cultures in the room.

Important to note, commonalities are rarely dramatic. They tend to look like this:

- A team agrees that “let me check I understood you” is a normal thing to say, not a sign of inattention.
- A team working in three languages writes decisions in one sentence in the chat before a meeting ends, because two members read more reliably than they hear.
- A team rotates who chairs, having noticed the same three people were shaping every discussion.
- A team agrees that the phrase “that’s interesting” is not agreement, because two

members had been reading it as one.

None of these transforms an organisation on its own. Repeated over months, they become how the team works – and that is what its culture actually consists of.

Pause and reflect: *Two questions. First: what does your team already share that you have never said out loud? Second: name one commonality the team has actually built – a way of working that did not exist before. If the first is easy and the second is hard, that is worth noticing.*

2.6 How commonalities actually develop: the transcultural learning process

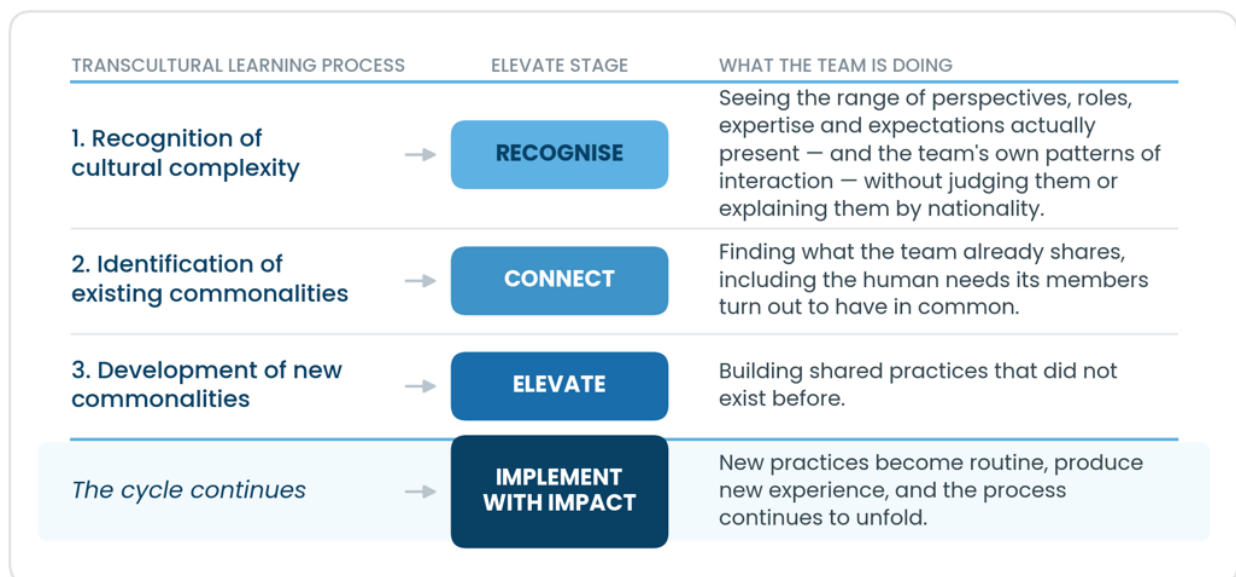
The transcultural learning process is the cycle through which people and organisations turn cultural

complexity into cooperation. It moves through three steps: recognising cultural complexity, identifying the commonalities that already exist, and developing new ones.

What drives it forward is shared experience and joint sensemaking. Commonalities cannot be decided in advance or issued as policy; they emerge when people do something together and make sense of it

afterwards. This is why “doing something together” is a precondition for the work rather than a nice addition to it.

The model comes from Grünfelder and Baumann Montecinos (2025), and the ELEVATE Learning Path is built directly on it. The correspondence is close enough to be worth setting out plainly:



Transcultural Learning and the ELEVATE Learning Path

Three things follow from this that matter in the room. It is a cycle, not a ladder. Nobody completes it. Developing a new commonality generates fresh experience, which reveals more about the complexity in the team, which opens the next round. This is also why ELEVATE does not treat competence as something a team eventually attains. Step 3 often makes differences clearer, not smaller. Building a shared practice tends to expose

the assumptions people were working from – which might be uncomfortable, and productive. A team noticing more difference after a session has not gone backwards; it has arrived at better material for the next one. Step 1 asks for a particular stance. The original concept calls it a non-normative observer’s attitude: noticing without evaluating, recognising your own largely unconscious assumptions, and accepting that you are not the

only expert on what is going on (Baumann Montecinos 2022). Crucially, it means giving up the idea that differences must be resolved *before* cooperation can begin. That single move is what makes the rest of the sequence possible.

2.7 Three levels, one capability

Transcultural competence operates at three levels. They are not three different things; they are one capability seen at three scales.



Transcultural competence on multiple levels

The levels support each other, but they do not substitute for one another. A team of individually skilled people can still collaborate badly, because the practices that hold a team together are built between people rather than carried in by them. Equally, a team can build excellent practices and lose them within a month if the

organisation gives it no time to meet. Transcultural competence is also **not** a fixed asset. It develops through interaction, and it can fade. A team that stops reviewing how it works will drift back to older habits under pressure – which is why the ELEVATE Learning Journey does not end when the sessions do.

In a nutshell:

- A team is not a collection of individuals from different backgrounds but a living social system that continuously remakes its own ways of working — so the useful question isn't *how are we different?* but *how can we collaborate effectively despite, and because of, our differences?*
- ELEVATE develops teams' collective capability to turn diversity into sustainable collaboration — cultural awareness, trust, resilience, and the capacity to keep learning together. Success is what a team is still doing months later, not satisfaction at the end of a session: attention moves from what people are to what they do together, aiming for a team that keeps cooperating through disagreement, not one that has stopped disagreeing.
- Transcultural competence is the willingness and capability of individuals, teams and organisations to develop new commonalities — shared meanings and practices reaching beyond what already exists — while respecting cultural diversity. Commonalities are both found and built, but the emphasis is on building: what a team already shares is limited by circumstance, what it can build is not. Similarity is not commonality — the goal is connecting while differences remain, not sameness.
- The capability has no ceiling and no prerequisite: any team can start, and one that has built four shared practices can build a fifth. Commonalities develop through a three-step cycle — recognising complexity, identifying what already exists, developing what doesn't — the transcultural learning process behind the Learning Path's stages.
- Transcultural competence works at three levels — individual, team, organisation — but ELEVATE focuses on the team, where practices are made. It isn't a possession and doesn't last by itself; it develops through interaction and needs maintaining, so the journey continues after sessions end. A facilitator needs no expertise in the cultures present — the work is helping a team build practices that belong to none of them and to all of them.
- Chapter 3 turns from what transcultural competence is to what it takes to begin: how an organisation, a team and a facilitator get ready for their transcultural learning journey.

Chapter 3: Getting ready for the ELEVATE journey – organisation, team and facilitator

What to expect in this chapter: Chapter 2 set out what transcultural competence is. This chapter turns to what it takes to begin. Before an ELEVATE Learning Journey can become meaningful, three readiness levels need attention: the organisation, the team and the facilitator. These are not three separate preparations. They are connected parts of one relational process. The organisation creates the conditions in which learning can be taken seriously and carried into everyday work. The team is where transcultural learning becomes real: people observe how they work together, make different perceptions discussable and develop shared practices. The facilitator prepares and holds the space in which that work can happen without imposing ready-made answers. The three levels support one another, but they do not substitute for one another. A well-prepared facilitator cannot compensate indefinitely for an organisation that gives a team no time or follow-up. Organisational support cannot make a team speak honestly if trust is missing. And a willing team still needs a process that protects voice, clarity and transfer. Readiness, in other words, is relational: it sits in the connections between conditions, people and process. This chapter therefore moves through the three levels in sequence while keeping their interdependence in view. At each level, you will find the same working structure: what readiness for transcultural learning means, how to prepare, the “Changes of Perspective” the ELEVATE approach asks for, barriers that may get in the way, and moments to pause and relate the material to your own setting.

Pause and reflect: *Before you read on, think of a team that may enter the ELEVATE Learning Journey. Where is readiness strongest today: in the organisation, in the team, or in the person who will facilitate the process? Where is the connection between these three levels weakest?*

3.1 Voices from the field: insights from the pilot organisations

The real value of transcultural learning is best measured in what changes in everyday practice. Before looking more closely at readiness, listen to practitioners from the ELEVATE pilot organisations. Their voices make the opportunity concrete and they make the potential challenges concrete, too.

Taken together, these accounts show why readiness cannot be reduced to enthusiasm for diversity or attendance at a workshop. They speak about mental schemas, psychological safety, value creation and innovation. They also speak about KPIs, time pressure, uncertainty around sensitive language and the pressure to make people fit dominant standards. That is precisely the terrain in which a

relational approach, as ELEVATE proposes it, has to work.

Testimonial 1

"It took a massive effort to break my own mental schema... Many people travel frequently, they have gone many times to China, they know a lot about the culture, but they have not understood. They know how people proceed, but they do not know the 'why' behind how they function from their own axis of coordinates."

Business Development Manager at an industrial company in the machining industry.

Testimonial 2

"People feel safe and comfortable to share who they are, how they are, and what their experiences are. That is what generates a true climate of diversity. They open the door and find a secure environment."

CEO of a digital marketing consultancy.

Testimonial 3

"We have seen that a relational approach directly influences commercial profitability by helping sales teams accurately read the emotional and cultural drivers of a negotiation."

CEO of a digital marketing consultancy.

Testimonial 4

"Adaptation to changing environments or coming up with new ideas will be harder with homogeneous recruiting practices. We have had two stages. The first was the search for clones with a vertical command/control structure. This resulted in zero problems, which was perfect for management, but completely imperfect for allowing new things to emerge."

CEO of a digital marketing consultancy.

3.2 What becomes possible

These voices point to a change that is personal, team-related and organisational. The first account describes the effort involved in questioning a familiar mental schema: knowing how people are expected to behave is not the same as understanding what is happening in a specific situation or a particular relationship. The second places safety at the centre: diversity becomes real when people can bring their experiences into the room. The third connects relational attention

directly to profitability. The fourth shows the organisational cost of similarity: structures that remove friction may also remove the conditions in which new ideas can emerge.

Together, they describe the relational move at the heart of ELEVATE: from passive recognition of diversity to active, value-creating learning and cooperation, by focusing on identifying and developing commonalities.

Testimonial 5

"I always look at things from a numerical perspective. Everything that does not have a direct economic impact falls right off the executive agenda... We need to bring this to a financial plane to prioritize it against other alternatives. We know the benefits, but how do we measure them? We lack data. We need clear KPIs. If you back your diversity actions with hard data, you can sell it internally because there is proof behind it."

CEO of a digital marketing consultancy.

Testimonial 7

"It is complicated to speak about these things without sounding a bit 'racist' or falling into paternalism... We watch what we say so intensely that it dilutes the discourse. There is a massive gap here—we almost need a dictionary of what is politically correct so we can address these realities normally and directly."

CEO of a social care services company.

Testimonial 6

"The sheer workload and the speed of business is a major challenge. It is hard to find time to stop and reflect when you have 10 meetings a day."

Head of HRM at a food multinational company subsidiary.

Testimonial 8

"You have to create space for diversity. I have seen embarrassing situations where organisations try to completely neutralize diversity. They expect everyone to adjust to 'our way' because they assume theirs is not the standard. That is losing. We must not try to uniformize organisations under Western standards."

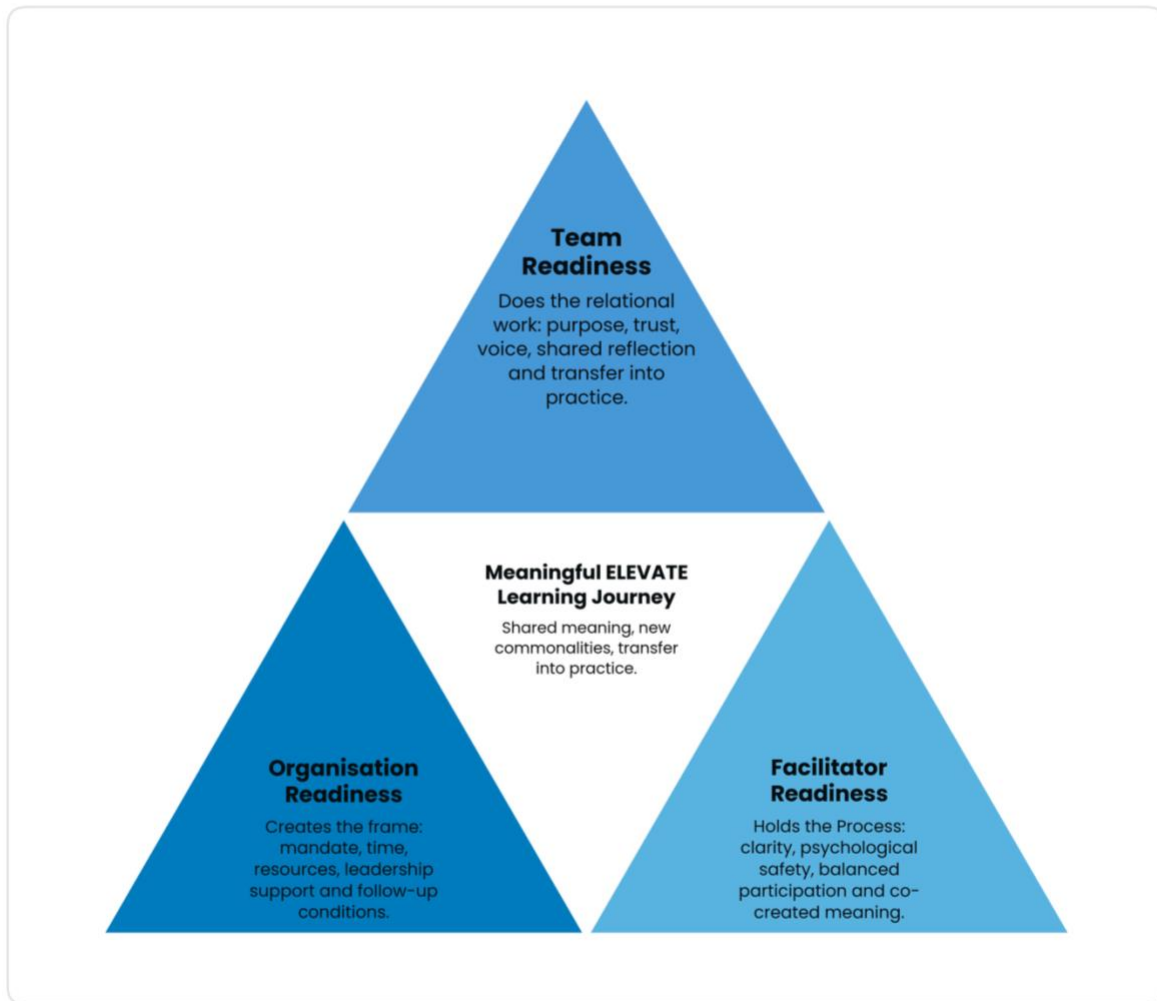
CEO of a social care services company.

3.3 What makes the transition difficult

These accounts are a useful reality check. Day-to-day business leaves little time to stop, reflect and discuss. Executive agendas ask for hard metrics. Sensitive language can make people cautious just when direct conversation is needed. And organisations can respond to diversity by explicitly asking those who are different to contribute to the discussion.

Acknowledging these challenges does not weaken the case for transcultural competence. It makes the relational, commonalities-focused approach more urgent. Moving from reactive firefighting to long-term capability and the development of new commonalities means recognising the conditions that shape interaction rather than treating them as background noise.

What practitioners see as valuable	What practitioners see as difficult
Breaking rigid mental schemas; moving from superficial cultural knowledge towards deeper understanding.	Making the value visible through metrics and KPIs.
Psychological safety in which people can share who they are and what they experience.	Finding time for reflection in a high-speed working day.
Commercial value through a better reading of emotional and cultural drivers in negotiation.	Speaking directly about sensitive issues without retreating into silence or paternalism.
Innovation and learning from and with each other rather than homogeneous recruiting and standard dynamics.	Resisting the tendency to neutralise diversity by imposing dominant standards.



Three connected readiness levels in the ELEVATE Learning Journey

3.4 The transculturally competent organisation

What to expect in this

subchapter: A transculturally competent organisation does more than aim for collaboration among people and teams with different backgrounds. It develops the capacity to cultivate it and develop new commonalities over time. The question is not how to manage a diverse workforce as a static condition, but how to design an organisational context in which interactions can evolve, deepen and create value for strategic

objectives and for the people and teams involved.

This is an ongoing journey rather than a single intervention. The section first looks at the conditions that make an organisation ready, then at two Changes of Perspective: from managing cultural diversity to actively shaping relational success, and from isolated interventions to a systemic approach. It then turns to the strategic, operational and relational practices reported by the pilot organisations, and to the barriers that can keep good

intentions from becoming organisational capability.

How to get ready for transcultural learning – as an organisation: Diversity “happens”. The question is whether the organisation is ready for it.

Cultural complexity is part of everyday organisational reality. Teams are multicultural; customers and suppliers are spread across the globe; organisations work with increasingly diverse partners and institutions. The ability to attract and grow diverse talent and build strong, long-term partnerships has therefore become closely connected to competitiveness.

Inclusive strategies, processes and everyday practices matter because the potential benefits of diversity do not arise automatically. New ways of working can strengthen collaboration among employees, customers and suppliers, support innovation and equity, and help organisations avoid costly misunderstanding. A relational lens adds something important: it asks people to verify and constantly re-calibrate alignment in the relationship rather than operate on assumptions.

True integration does not mean asking multicultural workers to erase their backgrounds to match corporate standards. The ELEVATE approach shifts attention from what sets people apart towards what they have in common and can develop together, without losing what makes them unique.

Pause and reflect: *Does your organisation view cultural diversity mainly as a challenge or opportunity, or as both? What practices and processes are already in place to develop its potential?*

A closer look at the required Changes of Perspective

Change of Perspective 1: From managing cultural diversity to actively shaping shared, relational success

The first change is from a reactive mindset to active design. Diversity is no longer treated mainly as a possible source of problems to be managed, or as a box to be checked. The organisation asks instead how it can create the structures and habits through which different perspectives connect productively.

This reframes cultural differences as a strategic resource for mutual value creation. It also changes what the organisation pays attention to: continuous learning

and structural flexibility become conditions for turning latent

potential into sustainable performance.

Potential benefit	What diversity may contribute	Evidence base
Creativity & innovation	Diverse teams tend to generate more original ideas and solutions.	Richard et al., 2003; Harnoss et al., 2022
Problem-solving & decision-making	Differing perspectives can foster deeper analysis and better decisions.	Stahl et al., 2010; Simons et al., 1999; Hofhuis et al., 2012
Market insight	Diversity may strengthen customer orientation and international understanding.	Fernandez & Kim, 2004
Learning & development	Cross-cultural work can enhance communication, collaboration and empathy.	Stahl et al., 2010; Edmondson & Harvey, 2018
Social cohesion	Exposure to difference can nurture tolerance and inclusion.	Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006
Commercial performance	A relational approach may help sales teams read emotional and cultural drivers of a negotiation.	Piloting participant

Accordingly, homogeneous recruiting may reduce friction in the short term, but experience from the pilots warns that it can also reduce the perspectives needed for adaptation and innovation. The ELEVATE approach therefore asks organisations to build the capacity to share, develop and adapt their knowledge frameworks continuously, and to foster a continuous learning mindset: They enable spaces where employees keep questioning assumptions and adapting interpretations and behaviour, internally and with external stakeholders. Overall, by cultivating their structural flexibility, the organisation can

turn learning into collective, dynamic capability and diffuse it across teams rather than leaving it with individuals.

Pause and reflect: *Does your organisation actively promote mutual learning and adaptation? How effectively are learning and proposals translated into coordinated action across teams and systems? How easily can processes be adapted when circumstances change?*

Change of Perspective 2: From isolated interventions to a cohesive systemic approach

The second change is from ad-hoc training and isolated reactions to a connected organisational approach. Transcultural competence becomes part of purpose, processes and everyday practices rather than an occasional activity alongside “real work”. The aim is to make effective cooperation a reliable feature of daily work rather than an accidental outcome.

The pilot organisations make this systemic view concrete at three

connected levels: strategic and long-term impact, operational reality, and relational practices. Strategy gives direction; processes translate that direction into the working day; relational practices are where people experience whether the commitment is real.

Strategic and long-term impact

At the strategic level, transcultural competence moves from reactive necessity to deliberate business driver. The pilot organisations reported the following practices:

Practices supporting readiness	Description	Voices from the pilot organisations
Strategic talent and market alignment: mirroring client diversity	Proactively map regional demographic realities of new or expanding markets and align HR strategies so workforce diversity can build internal cultural capacity for future business operations.	“My engineering clients are working more and more in Morocco every day. Within five years we are going to need 30 people in this region, right? Well, for recruiting, maybe an analysis [of cultural diversity] needs to be done.” – <i>International Project Manager, water industry company.</i>
Institutionalising governance	Establish dedicated international leadership roles and explicit budgets to monitor, execute and scale regional transcultural actions.	“What I would do in that case is create a role, a profile—I don't care—from headquarters, from the main office; a director from xx who can be responsible for putting focus on this issue, with a manager depending on that person in Europe, in APAC... I think I would create a role, a budget directed to a global

		team dedicated to that.” – <i>International Project Manager, water industry company.</i>
Volunteer-led inclusion (“Champions”)	Shift ownership from top-down HR compliance to local, cross-departmental groups of volunteers who propose and execute actions relevant to their context.	“We have a central DEI department, but locally we rely on groups of ‘champions’-volunteers who want to propose things. Here we have a committee of 12 people out of 50 employees. This ensures we work through actions rather than words. If it is not lived out daily, it just stays as a sterile presentation.” – <i>HRM, food industry company.</i>
Aligning incentives for cross-border collaboration	Ensure international teams prioritise seamless cooperation over competition for shared revenue; combine workflows and customs across zones.	“Since we have offices almost all over the world, it’s about integrating yourself well into all time zones, customs, to try to collaborate with your colleagues and see who gets the revenue, right?” – <i>International Project Manager, water quality testing and monitoring company.</i>

Operational reality

The operational level is where a transcultural commitment meets

the realities of workflow. Pilot organisations described adjustments such as these

Practices supporting readiness	Description	Voices from the pilot organisations
Context-aware operational planning	Integrate local religious calendars, time zones and regional dynamics into project management; adapt physical labour and deadlines to local realities rather than forcing a standard pace.	“We had cases with Ramadan where field managers didn’t know exactly how to act; physical labor without food or water makes workers fatigued. We realized we need to stop, realize we are in Ramadan, and adjust schedules and workflows. Our project managers need training beforehand on the specific ways countries

		operate." – <i>Finance Director, life science company.</i>
Visual tools for communication	Use simple visual communication tools, such as colour-coded personality frameworks, to help team members express working preferences and habits without judgement.	"In an international environment, the way people work and ask for things changes a lot; some sound curt, but that's just how they are. We used personality tests to understand our diverse working habits. It explains in a very easy way, using colors, their way of working and how they function best. It makes the team feel deeply understood." – <i>HRM, food industry company.</i>
Borderless collaboration and remote trust	Move from rigid geographical boundaries in recruitment towards competence-based coordination and organisational frameworks for remote trust and performance.	"We want to be a super global, international company, with members from all over the world. As long as they can perform the function correctly, they don't have to be physically in the country. I mean, there are other colleagues of mine who do European roles and are here in XX, or someone in Barcelona doing a UK role." – <i>International Project Manager, water industry company.</i>
Integrated diversity onboarding	Embed diversity and inclusion into onboarding across departments and encourage visibility and cross-sharing of backgrounds and team experiences.	"In onboarding, when a person joins us –no matter what department they go to– there is a part of the training that is from HR, social, diversity, and inclusion. We do a lot of visualization, visibility, even dissemination of all team members. From the top, they always say: 'hey, share everything you can'." – <i>International Project Manager, water industry company.</i>

Relational practices

The relational level is where strategy and process are experienced in daily interaction.

Pilot organisations described practices intended to build trust, reduce stereotypes and make connection possible:

Practices supporting readiness	Description	Voices from the pilot organisations
Immersive exchange programmes	Create extended opportunities for employees or interns to work side-by-side in different locations; daily collaboration becomes the setting in which stereotypes can be dismantled.	"The most direct way to tackle this is exchange; that a local employee can have an exchange or that a foreign branch intern stays here for a certain period of time. It is the daily coexistence that does the real work. The daily routine is what matters most." – <i>Business Development Manager, industrial machining company.</i>
Safe social spaces for integration	Create formalised physical environments that support social safety and integration networks for highly diverse or vulnerable workforces.	"The Care Space, as we call it, aims to be a meeting point that allows sharing and acts as a safety net for our highly diverse collective. It gives them a formalized space to socialize, have talks, receive training, and find a safe spot to build an integration network." – <i>CEO, social care services company.</i>
Formalising face-to-face encounters	Use periodic physical meetings to humanise relationships, strengthen non-verbal communication and trust, and improve later virtual collaboration.	"Seeing each other much more. I mean, also the fact that we are people... when you are in a face-to-face meeting, it is much more productive, even in terms of non-verbal communication, the

		energy there is not the same as over Teams. Afterwards, a call with someone you've already met is completely different. I think that would make things a lot easier." – <i>International Project Manager, water industry company.</i>
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These practices are starting points, not a finished blueprint. The pilot material suggests experimentation: adapt practices to the contours of the organisation

and pay attention to whether they become part of daily routines. Competence becomes capability when inclusion is integrated into how work actually happens.

Potential barriers and how to respond to them

Potential barriers or critical situations	Possible ways to respond
<i>The value of "soft skills" disappears from executive agendas when direct economic impact is unclear.</i>	Connect transcultural action to strategic priorities and observable indicators; the pilot voices explicitly call for clear KPIs and evidence.
<i>The speed and workload of daily business leave little room to stop and reflect.</i>	Create deliberate spaces and routines for reflection rather than relying on spare time; start with a small number of strategically important relationships or teams and learn through action.
<i>Sensitive language creates anxiety and inhibits direct conversation.</i>	Create psychologically and socially safe spaces in which experiences and different interpretations can be voiced without forcing people into uniform categories.
<i>Dominant standards neutralise diversity by requiring others to adapt to "our way".</i>	Keep diversity intact while developing shared practices; avoid confusing commonality with uniformity.

<i>Initiatives remain fragmented or symbolic.</i>	Connect strategic purpose, operational processes and relational practices; give ownership, roles, budgets and follow-up enough visibility to make the work part of the organisation rather than an isolated presentation.
<i>Learning remains with individuals or single teams.</i>	Use structural flexibility to diffuse learning and connect local improvements to organisational systems.

Pause and reflect: *Where does your organisation currently have the strongest readiness: strategic purpose, operational processes, or relational practices? Which useful practice already exists locally but has not travelled beyond one team? What would have to change for that learning to become organisational capability?*

What have we tackled in this subchapter?

A transculturally competent organisation does not merely manage diversity; it actively creates conditions in which cooperation can develop and create value.

- The first Change of Perspective moves from reactive diversity management to the active

architecture of shared, relational success.

- The second moves from isolated interventions to a systemic approach connecting strategic purpose, operational processes and relational practices.
- Continuous learning and structural flexibility help turn potential benefits into collective capability.
- Pilot organisations show that readiness is built through concrete practices – from governance and incentives to onboarding, context-aware planning, exchange and safe relational spaces.
- The path involves friction: metrics, time pressure, language, structural bias and fragmented ownership all need to be addressed rather than ignored.



Key takeaways: A transculturally competent organisation does not treat diversity as a condition to be managed from the outside. It creates a strategic, operational and relational ecosystem in which people can learn from and with one another, develop new commonalities and translate local learning into shared organisational capability.

An organisation can create the frame, but it cannot do the learning on behalf of a team. The next level moves closer to the interaction itself: the shared conditions that allow people to turn self-assessment and dialogue into better collaboration.

3.5 The transculturally competent team

What to expect in this subchapter:

This subchapter focuses on the team level: the shared conditions that allow self-assessment, dialogue and reflection to become meaningful for everyday collaboration rather than a formal exercise. It does not replace the practical instructions for the Self-Assessment Tool or the Learning Path. Its focus is readiness before and during the process.

Organisational readiness can create the frame, and facilitator readiness can hold the process, but team readiness is where transcultural learning becomes real in practice. A team does not

need to be free of tension. It needs enough purpose, trust and willingness to look at how it works, make different perceptions visible, and turn reflection into shared meaning and action. This understanding is consistent with research on organisational readiness, psychological safety, team learning and training transfer, which all point to the same practical lesson: learning processes become credible only when people see both a reason to engage and a path into practice (Armenakis, Harris & Mossholder 1993; Edmondson 1999; Baldwin & Ford 1988; Weiner 2009).

How to get ready for transcultural learning – as a team

Teams already collaborate across cultures, professions, generations, languages and levels of seniority. Yet the practices through which they give feedback, make decisions, listen, share responsibility and handle conflict often remain implicit. A team is therefore not ready simply because it is diverse or because

its members are willing to attend a workshop. Research on diverse and multicultural teams shows that diversity may create value, but not automatically that. Its benefits depend on how teams communicate, integrate different perspectives and work with the tensions that arise (DiStefano & Maznevski 2000; Stahl et al. 2010; Hofhuis, van der Zee & Otten 2012; Stahl & Tung 2015).

Readiness begins when the team understands why the process matters, accepts that its collaboration patterns benefit

from continued reflection, and is willing to turn self-assessment into dialogue, shared responsibility and concrete practice. In the ELEVATE logic, this is also where transcultural competence becomes practical: the team learns to observe its interaction, identify existing commonalities, and develop new shared meanings and practices without asking members to become the same (Welsch 1999; Baumann Montecinos, Grünfelder & Wieland 2023; Grünfelder & Baumann Montecinos 2025).

Practices supporting readiness	Description
Purpose Clarity	The team understands why it is entering the Learning Path and what it is meant to improve.
Psychological safety	Members feel sufficiently safe to express uncertainty, disagreement or critical observations without fearing embarrassment, exclusion or punishment.
Balanced participation	The process does not depend only on the most vocal members; quieter or less powerful voices are actively invited and taken seriously.
Respect for different forms of knowledge	Seniority, practical experience, recent academic knowledge and external perspectives are treated as complementary rather than competing sources of authority.

Openness to diagnosis	The team accepts the SAT as a mirror for reflection, not as a test, ranking or audit.
Transfer orientation	The team is willing to translate insights into concrete actions, responsibilities, deadlines and follow-up.

Team readiness: A team is ready for transcultural learning when its members understand the purpose of the process, accept that their current collaboration patterns may need reflection, and are willing to turn self-assessment into dialogue, shared responsibility and concrete practice.

A closer look at the required Changes of Perspective

Change of Perspective 1: From “we are diverse” to observing how we actually work together

The first change is from treating diversity or workshop participation as evidence of readiness to observing the team as a living social system. The team looks at how members communicate, make decisions, give feedback, share responsibility, include newcomers or quieter members, and react when assumptions are challenged. In this sense, the team becomes a community of practice that learns through shared

activity, not only through individual insight (Wenger 1999).

Tension and disagreement are not proof that the team is failing. They can be the material from which learning begins, provided the team can work with them without turning them into accusation, silence or resistance. This is why psychological safety matters: it allows people to take interpersonal risks, ask questions, disagree, admit uncertainty and learn from errors without fear of humiliation or punishment (Edmondson 1999; Nembhard & Edmondson 2006).

Pause and reflect: *Which collaboration patterns does the team already know about, but rarely discuss openly?*

Who usually speaks first, and whose observations may remain hidden?

Where does the team interpret disagreement as a problem rather than as useful information?

Change of Perspective 2: From self-assessment as evaluation to self-assessment as a mirror for dialogue

The second change concerns diagnosis. The SAT is not there to prove that a team is good or bad. Its purpose is to make different perceptions visible so that the team can decide what it wants to work on together. Differences in answers are therefore not a problem to remove; they are information for the learning process.

Without preparation, the SAT can be mistaken for a performance evaluation, a management instrument or another questionnaire whose results disappear afterwards. Participants may then answer defensively, formally or passively. A team may also be technically ready to complete the SAT without being emotionally or relationally ready to learn from it. Members may have lost confidence that anything will change or experience the process as another activity requested from above. Strong internal divisions, dominant voices, status differences or fixed assumptions such as “we already know better” can weaken the learning potential even when data are collected.

Before the SAT is used, the team therefore needs a clear explanation of purpose, confidentiality, use of results and expected follow-up. It also needs enough voice climate for different perspectives to surface. Research on employee voice shows that people do not speak up simply because a channel exists; they speak when they believe their contribution is welcome, safe and consequential (Detert & Burris 2007).

Suggested facilitator message

before the SAT: “The self-assessment is not a test and not an audit. It is a mirror. It helps us see how different people experience the same team. Differences in answers are not a problem; they are the beginning of the conversation – and the learning process.”

Change of Perspective 3: From voice as input to voice as shared action

The third change is from collecting people’s views to making their contribution consequential. Voice becomes credible when it is heard, structured and connected to the other learners in a shared process of co-creating new commonalities. When a team identifies patterns in feedback, communication, role clarity, accountability or belonging, those

insights become the starting ground for next steps.

A good action does not need to be large, but it needs to be specific, realistic and reviewable: What will we do together? Who will take responsibility? When will we review whether something has changed? This connects team readiness with training transfer research, which shows that learning only becomes valuable when it is applied, maintained and supported in the work context (Baldwin & Ford 1988; Blume et al. 2010; Grossman & Salas 2011; Salas et al. 2012).

Without this transfer discipline, even a strong facilitated session can lose credibility. With follow-up, the team can experience that reflection leads to shared responsibility and that small changes in routines can influence how collaboration is lived. In practice, the “paper result”

matters, but it is not enough on its own. Participants also need to experience that the dialogue was open, balanced and taken seriously. Only then do measures become more than entries in a plan.

Practice note: The quality of a team dialogue is not measured by how quickly agreement is reached. It is measured by whether different perceptions can be expressed, heard, structured and transformed into shared learning without blame.

Potential barriers and how to respond to them

Not every team is immediately ready for a reflective process. That does not mean it should be excluded. It means preparation, leadership framing and facilitation may need to be adapted.

Potential barriers or critical situations	Possible ways to respond
<i>Participants attend only because management requested the process.</i>	Strengthen the kick-off and return to the purpose of the process. Make clear that the team is working on its own practices rather than receiving ready-made solutions.
<i>The team has unresolved conflict, low trust or repeated disappointment with previous initiatives.</i>	Do not push immediately into sensitive topics. Clarify confidentiality and begin with less personal collaboration practices and small experiences of constructive exchange.

<i>The team is silent.</i>	Start with individual reflection, written notes or anonymous clustering before open discussion. Do not interpret silence too quickly as lack of interest.
<i>One or two voices dominate while others withdraw.</i>	Use structured rounds, time-limited contributions or small groups. Make participation visible without embarrassing dominant members.
<i>Different groups dismiss each other's knowledge.</i>	Treat seniority, practical experience, recent academic knowledge and external perspectives as complementary sources of authority.
<i>Participants become defensive.</i>	Return to purpose. Emphasise that different perceptions are data for learning, not evidence of failure.
<i>The team wants quick solutions.</i>	Acknowledge the need for action, but slow the process enough to understand the pattern behind the problem. Fast solutions without shared understanding rarely transfer.
<i>Participants are unclear about confidentiality or fear that feedback may be used against them.</i>	Clarify how SAT results and workshop insights will be used before asking for honest reflection.
<i>There is no plan for follow-up.</i>	Translate insights into a shared action plan with specific practices, responsibilities, deadlines and observable success indicators.

What have we tackled in this subchapter?

- Team readiness is more than motivation or diversity. It is a shared willingness and habit of looking honestly at how the team works.
- A ready team has purpose clarity, enough psychological safety, balanced participation, respect for different forms of knowledge, openness to diagnosis and a transfer orientation.

- The SAT works best as a mirror for dialogue rather than as a test, ranking or audit.
- Different perceptions are useful material. The goal is not quick agreement, but the ability to turn them into shared learning without blame.
- Voice becomes credible when it leads to visible, specific and reviewable action.
- Warning signs call for adapted preparation and facilitation, not automatic exclusion from the Learning Journey.

Key takeaways: A transculturally competent team is not a team without differences. It is a team that recognises its differences, can exchange about them safely, connects them to shared processes of co-creating new commonalities, and transforms shared experience and reflection into better collaboration.

A team can be willing to look at itself, but the conditions for honest reflection do not appear automatically. Someone has to prepare the space, protect the process and help the group move from observation to shared meaning and practical change. That brings us to the facilitator.

3.6 The transculturally competent facilitator

What to expect in this

subchapter: This subchapter turns to the developmental steps involved in transcultural facilitation. The move from conventional intercultural practice is not a rejection of what a facilitator already knows. It is a

change in where attention goes and how expertise is used. Three Changes of Perspective mark that developmental arc: from explaining differences to questioning fixed cultural boundaries; from categories to emergence; and from interpreting for others to co-creating meaning. Together, they develop the facilitator's capacity to stay with uncertainty, read relational patterns as they form and hold space for collective sense-making. The barriers are included as information, not discouragement, and the reflection moments are there to connect the ideas to situations a facilitator may actually encounter.

How to get ready for transcultural learning – as a facilitator:

Becoming a transcultural facilitator may require several internal changes from conventional intercultural practice. Readiness can be seen in observable capabilities: greater comfort with uncertainty, the ability to read relational patterns as they form, and confidence in holding space for collective sense-making rather than providing the “right” interpretation. The work is demanding because it changes the facilitator’s operating mode. Cultural knowledge does not disappear, but it stops being the automatic first explanation. The facilitator attends to the live interaction, treats assumptions as hypotheses, notices what is emerging and helps the group make meaning together.

A closer look at the required Changes of Perspective

Change of Perspective 1: From explaining differences to questioning fixed cultural boundaries

This Change of Perspective asks the facilitator to become more comfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity in live interactions. In practice, this means resisting the impulse to default to “that’s their culture” as an explanation, staying with a confusing interaction

without rushing to categorise it, asking what else besides culture may be shaping the situation, and noticing when a cultural explanation feels too neat or too quick.

Transculturality thinks beyond bounded cultures: cultures are dynamic, interwoven and shaped through relations rather than sealed off from one another. In real work situations, things develop through interaction. The task is therefore not simply to apply ready-made rules, but to read what is emerging and adjust as you go.

For facilitation, this means observing what is happening rather than only what is supposed to happen. Who speaks and who is silent? Where does energy rise or drop? Which topics trigger tension or avoidance? The facilitator treats interpretations as provisional hypotheses, works with the relational flux and responds to emerging questions and challenges. The design becomes a living structure rather than a fixed script.

Pause and reflect: *It is the last day before holidays, and a local supermarket is crowded. Employees who are usually polite and focused on order and quick service become visibly overwhelmed and start shouting to each other. What would you observe as a transcultural facilitator? Is the boundary between “good order” and “breakdown” a cultural border or a contextual one?*

Change of Perspective 2: From categories to emergence

As this perspective develops, attention shifts more strongly towards relational patterns as they form. The facilitator learns to describe what is happening before applying cultural labels, to notice shifts in tone, pace, silence or energy before interpreting them, and to name emerging dynamics without immediately assigning blame or cause. Implicit assumptions can then be made explicit, while real-time observation remains more important than forcing the situation into a preconceived model.

Here the facilitator stops treating culture as a set of stable boundaries to navigate and begins facilitating the process through which boundaries are negotiated, blurred and reshaped

in interaction. Culture is no longer the frame around the work; it is one dynamic factor within the work itself.

Pause and reflect: *A participant in a workshop starts to reveal unease with the gap between the declared values of an organisation and their lived experience. What would you observe as a transcultural facilitator? How would you react?*

Change of Perspective 3: From interpreting for others to co-creating meaning

This Change of Perspective also asks for confidence in holding space for collective sense-making rather than providing answers. The facilitator can ask open questions and allow the group to develop its own reading, remain comfortable without a “right” interpretation upfront, share emerging observations with appropriate vulnerability, and use expertise to amplify the group’s capacity to make meaning rather than to dispense a definitive explanation. The third change is from diagnosing the situation from outside to participating in sense-making from within. The transcultural facilitator does not stand above the process with the correct interpretation. They help the group notice what is

happening, surface assumptions and build a shared reading in real time.

Intercultural practice can sometimes place the facilitator in the role of translator or cultural decoder. Transcultural facilitation goes further: understanding is produced together rather than delivered by the facilitator alone. The posture changes from expert to co-inquirer, from explanation to inquiry, from solution-giving to meaning-making, and from certainty to responsiveness. The

cultural expert becomes a relational co-facilitator.

Pause and reflect: *A group is struggling to find a strategy for project implementation. Different identities clash; there is no consensus about whom the project is for or what the final outcome should be. What do you observe as a transcultural facilitator, and how do you react? Does the group face a planning problem or a meaning problem*

Potential barriers and how to respond to them

Potential barriers or critical situations	Possible ways to respond
Concerning “Questioning fixed cultural boundaries” <i>Cognitive: cultural explanations feel like reliable shortcuts.</i> <i>Emotional: loss of expert identity and discomfort with ambiguity.</i> <i>Practical: time pressure demands fast answers.</i>	Hold more than one hypothesis before deciding what an interaction means. Treat cultural explanations as provisional. Stay with uncertainty long enough to notice power, role, topic sensitivity, group history or context.
Concerning “Working with emergence” <i>Cognitive: habit of retrospective analysis rather than live reading; difficulty separating observation from interpretation.</i> <i>Emotional: fear of being wrong in real time.</i> <i>Practical: fast-paced meetings leave little space to pause and notice.</i>	Describe the relational dynamic before labelling it culturally. Notice tone, pace, silence and energy. Make assumptions explicit and hold several possibilities at once.
Concerning “Co-creating meaning”: <i>Cognitive: belief that groups need answers rather than questions.</i>	Ask open questions, design supportive processes and trust collective sense-making. Share

<i>Emotional: vulnerability and fear of losing authority.</i> <i>Practical: groups and stakeholders may expect directive leadership and solutions.</i>	emerging observations without presenting them as facts. Measure success through relational capacity and shared ownership, not only through explanations given.
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How facilitator readiness develops across the Changes of Perspective

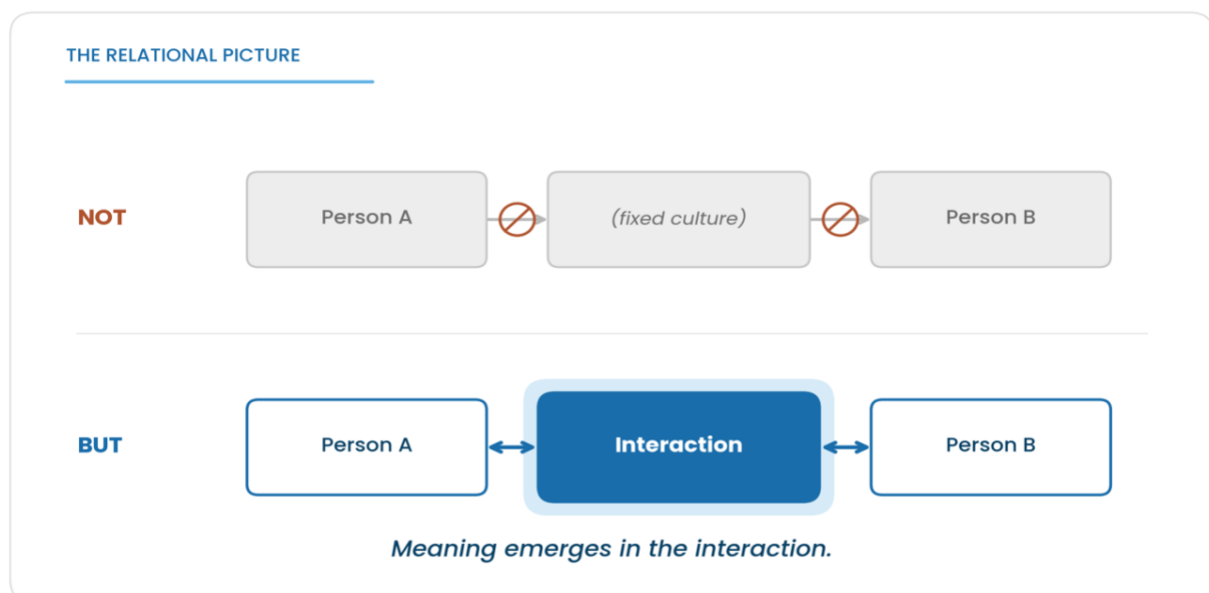
Change of Perspective	What developing readiness looks like
<i>Questioning fixed cultural boundaries</i>	You increasingly question your own cultural explanations and hold alternative hypotheses open before deciding what an interaction means.
<i>Working with emergence</i>	You increasingly read live situations through relational patterns – tone, pace, silence, energy and interaction – before reaching for cultural categories.
<i>Co-creating meaning</i>	You increasingly facilitate shared meaning-making with confidence, using questions and process design to help the group develop its own understanding and ownership.

Pause and reflect: *notice your current facilitation practice. When something confusing happens, do you avoid automatically reaching for a cultural explanation first? Can you name at least two other hypotheses – for example power, role, topic sensitivity or group history – before considering culture? Do you notice when cultural labels reduce your own discomfort with ambiguity? Can you describe the relational dynamic in the room without cultural terms first? Are you more curious than threatened when experience does not fit neat cultural patterns? Do you usually think in terms of overlapping identities and contexts rather than single cultural categories?*

Do you trust the group to find its own understanding if you ask good questions and design supportive processes? Are you comfortable not having the “right” cultural interpretation? Do you measure success by changes in relational capacity and shared ownership, not only by your ability to explain differences?

These capabilities reinforce one another. Questioning fixed explanations creates space for reading what is emerging; reading what is emerging, in turn, makes it easier to support shared sense-

making without falling back on a ready-made interpretation. The development is therefore best understood as a connected practice rather than as a sequence of fixed stages.



Facilitation and the transcultural picture

What have we tackled in this subchapter?

- Transcultural facilitation changes the centre of gravity from cultural explanation to live relational process.
- The first Change of Perspective questions fixed cultural boundaries and asks the facilitator to tolerate ambiguity rather than categorise too quickly.
- The second moves from categories to emergence and develops the ability to notice relational patterns as they form.
- The third moves from interpreting for others to co-creating meaning and positions the facilitator as a co-inquirer who supports collective sense-making.

The barriers are cognitive, emotional and practical. Readiness grows through observable habits: holding hypotheses lightly, reading interaction in real time, asking open questions and trusting the group's capacity to build shared meaning.

The three Changes of Perspective are developmental and connected rather than isolated techniques.

Organisation, team and facilitator are now back in view together. The organisation creates the conditions, the team does the relational work, and the facilitator holds a process in which that work

can become visible and develop. None is sufficient alone. Their connection is what makes the ELEVATE journey possible.

Pause and reflect: *Looking across the three readiness levels, what is the smallest concrete preparation that would strengthen the whole system rather than only one part of it?*

Who needs to be involved before the Learning Journey begins?

What will tell you that readiness has moved from good intention into everyday practice.



In a nutshell: In a nutshell: Getting ready for ELEVATE is not one preparatory task. It is a connected readiness process across organisation, team and facilitator. At organisational level, the work is to move from passive diversity management and isolated interventions towards relational architecture and a systemic approach. At team level, readiness means being able to look honestly at collaboration, use different perceptions as material for learning and turn voice into visible action. At facilitator level, the work is to move from fixed explanations towards emergence and co-created meaning.

The pilot organisations show both why this matters and why it is difficult. They describe psychological safety, innovation, commercial insight and deeper understanding; they also describe time pressure, the demand for metrics, uncertainty around language and the risk of imposing dominant standards. Readiness does not remove these tensions. It creates a way of working with them.

The practical invitation is therefore to start where the relationships are real. Build the conditions, make the interaction visible, experiment with shared practices, and connect learning back into everyday work. Transcultural competence is not a destination. It develops through interaction and needs to be maintained.

Key takeaways: A transculturally competent facilitator does not need to have the “right” cultural explanation ready. They stay attentive to what is emerging in the specific team, hold interpretations lightly and create a process in which participants can make assumptions visible, develop new commonalities and develop shared meaning and practice together.

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For Chapter 1, see the main source: ELEVATE Desk Research, Project Deliverable 3.3 (27 May 2025). The full list of academic references underlying the approach are listed in the project deliverable [bibliography](#).

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Part II

Assess: set the stage for learning with the ELEVATE Self-Assessment Tool

[Part 1](#) ended with readiness: what an organisation, a team and a facilitator each need in place before transcultural learning can take hold. Part 2 turns to the next question. Before deciding what to change, an organisation needs to know where it actually stands – not as a static inventory, but as a momentum in an ongoing process.

Rather than an audit or certification, the ELEVATE Self-Assessment Tool (SAT) is a mirror for organizational dialogue. It provides a structured way for people and teams to explore how their purpose, processes, and everyday practices interact, helping them see where their systems align, where they pull apart, and how to co-create a shared path forward.

Part 2 follows the same three questions used throughout the handbook. [Chapter 4](#) asks what the SAT is and why it exists. [Chapter 5](#) explains how it works in practice. [Chapter 6](#) turns to what a facilitator needs to be aware of when leading the process. The part closes with [best practices](#) from the piloting phase and selected voices of the organisations that tested the tool.

Chapter 4: What is the ELEVATE Self-Assessment Tool?

What to expect from this chapter: Many organisations hold inclusive values on paper and still struggle to translate them into consistent decisions, routines and team behaviours. This chapter introduces the tool ELEVATE developed to close that gap.

The ELEVATE Self-Assessment Tool at a glance:

What	A 26-area organisational reflection and action tool
Who	Cross-functional teams, lea:ders, HR, L&D, DEI professionals and facilitators
Time	20–30 minutes individual reflection; 60–90 minutes facilitated discussion, depending on scope
Output	A maturity profile, priority areas and concrete next steps

4.1. Why the SAT exists

The SAT is a mirror, not an audit:

Conventional intercultural tools mostly tend to do one of two things. Some reduce culture to fixed national profiles, which tells a team very little about what will work between these particular people. Others produce a score without creating the conversations that would make the score useful.

The SAT is built differently. Participants assess the organisation's current reality rather than its stated policy, and differences between their answers become evidence for dialogue

rather than errors to be smoothed away. The aim is not to label people, certify performance or rank organisations against one another. It is to recognise patterns, connect perspectives and develop shared practices that make collaboration work.

This is the same shift described in [Part 1, Chapter 3.2](#): from self-assessment as evaluation to self-assessment as a mirror for dialogue. The SAT is the instrument that makes that change of perspective practical.

Core idea: Diversity is a fact. Collaboration is a competence. The SAT helps an organisation see how far that competence is reflected in its purpose, processes and everyday practices — and decide what to strengthen next.

For the transcultural approach on which the SAT rests, and for the definitions of transcultural competence and commonalities, see [Part 1, Chapters 1 and 2](#) of this handbook.

4.2 Why an interactive reflection tool rather than a test

The SAT grew out of the ELEVATE research phase: a review of more than 80 sources, surveys with 243 employees and 88 consultants, and 40 interviews. What emerged as the recurring need was not another awareness score. It was a shared language connecting strategic intent, organisational systems and everyday collaboration.

Because transcultural competence is co-created, it cannot be established by an external expert or captured in a number alone. The SAT was therefore designed as an interactive reflection process with three elements :

Individual responses protect independent viewpoints and

reduce the pressure to conform.

The collective debrief makes patterns, assumptions and gaps visible.

Action planning turns that insight into new shared practices.

Differences in answers are not a problem to remove. They are often the most valuable material the process produces.

Pause and reflect: *When your organisation last assessed anything about its culture, what happened to the results? Did they start a conversation, or did they produce a report?*

4.3 What the SAT assesses

The SAT contains 26 subcategories across three connected dimensions. Together they show whether intent, organisational systems and lived experience reinforce one another.

Dimension	Items	Guiding question	Areas covered
Purpose — why	7	What does the organisation stand for and prioritise?	1. vision and mission; 2. strategic alignment; 3. measurement and accountability; 4. resource allocation; 5. community engagement; 6. governance; 7. awareness
Process — how	10	How are decisions and systems designed?	8. sourcing and supply chains; 9. innovation and R&D; 10. marketing and customer service; 11. recruitment, 12. onboarding, 13. progression and learning; 14. communication
Practices — what	9	What happens in daily collaboration?	15. leadership and empowerment; 16. communication and feedback; 17. accountability; 18. Transcultural learning; 19. cross-team collaboration; 20. conflict; 21. team onboarding

Read across the system

A strong vision cannot compensate for exclusionary recruitment or poor feedback habits. The three dimensions exist so that users can detect exactly this kind of gap between stated intent and lived practice.

The **Practices** dimension deserves particular attention, because it is the level at which teams can act

directly. It is also the dimension the ELEVATE Learning Path works with. See [Chapter 7](#) for how SAT results become the starting point of a team's Learning Journey.

4.4 The three maturity stages

For every subcategory, participants select the description that best reflects the dominant current pattern. Each stage is a developmental lens, not a judgement of people or a claim of perfection.

1 • RECOGNISE	2 • CONNECT	3 • LEVERAGE
Diversity is noticed, often when a challenge, misunderstanding or compliance issue appears. Familiar or dominant ways of working remain the default.	People deliberately seek input, adapt communication and build bridges. Diversity is seen as both a challenge and a source of learning.	Diversity is embedded in co-created practices, decisions and learning. Shared ways of working support trust, belonging, adaptability and innovation.

An organisation can sit at different stages in different areas, and this is normal rather than a sign of inconsistency. *Leverage* is not a permanent end-state either: contexts change, so mature practice still requires reflection and renewal.

A note on naming. The SAT's three maturity stages describe how far an organisation has come. The ELEVATE Learning Path and the ELEVATE E-Learning Space, introduced in Parts 3 and 4, use four developmental stages — RECOGNISE, CONNECT, ELEVATE and IMPLEMENT WITH IMPACT — to describe how a team develops over time. The two share vocabulary but answer different questions: the SAT

diagnoses an organisation, the Learning Path develops a team, and the E-Learning Space accompanies the individual learning of the participants. All are used in the same engagement, so it is worth naming the difference when introducing either one.

4.5 What a SAT item looks like

Each subcategory opens with a short definition followed by three behaviourally anchored descriptions. Participants choose the description closest to the organisation's current reality. The wording is concrete enough to support a clear choice while leaving room for examples and discussion.

9. Onboarding of new members into the team: Welcoming new members effectively by providing clear guidance on communication norms, decision-making habits, and feedback styles to shape belonging, performance, and retention.

Please choose one description that fits the current state of your organization most :

- A** We handle onboarding informally and focus mainly on tasks. Team norms are implicit, so new members learn by observing and adapting to existing habits.
- B** We follow a basic onboarding routine that includes a welcome meeting, a buddy or mentor, and an introduction to key team norms. Leaders encourage questions and clarify expectations, making some adjustments for individual needs and working styles.
- C** We treat onboarding as a shared team practice that builds inclusion and learning. Our team co-creates and updates onboarding based on newcomer feedback, using their diverse experiences to improve our ways of working and strengthen belonging and performance.

[GLOSSARY](#)

Example item: Onboarding (item from the Process dimension), showing the Recognise (A), Connect (B) and Leverage (C) descriptions.

Selected groups of items are followed by open reflection questions. These prompts move the conversation beyond “which level are we?” towards evidence, meaning and the practices the organisation may want to change.

If you look for deeper self reflection you can use these questions:

- Do we select partners on cultural alignment as well as cost and quality? To what extent do we treat suppliers as partners for mutual learning and innovation, and where could we create more space for shared problem-solving and long-term value?
- How do we form project teams? What processes do we use to intentionally include people from diverse backgrounds?
- Who usually shapes our ideas and decisions? How intentionally do we invite diverse people to help create ideas and make decisions?
- Whose needs do we mainly have in mind when we design our products, services, and marketing? How do we design products or services for varied audiences?
- How do we balance using standard scripts with adapting our customer service to different cultural expectations and needs? How do we bring in diverse customers' perspectives when shaping and improving our service?
- How do we focus our job descriptions and interviews more on candidates' skills and potential rather than on personal similarity? In what concrete ways do we make our short-listing and interviewing practices more aware of and resistant to bias?

Examples of deeper reflection questions from the Processes dimension.

4.6 Who should use it, and when

The SAT is designed for organisations, teams and professional communities that want to improve collaboration across cultural and other meaningful differences. It is particularly useful for:

leaders and cross-functional management teams aligning strategy with everyday practice;
HR, L&D and DEI professionals planning organisational development;
team leaders working across functions, sites, regions or professional cultures;
trainers, consultants and facilitators preparing a wider ELEVATE Learning Path;
organisations approaching integration, international cooperation, growth, restructuring or a renewed inclusion strategy.

4.7 What makes the ELEVATE SAT distinctive

The following aspects highlight what makes the ELEVATE SAT and its approach unique:

- **Organisational, not personal.** It examines how the system works. Responses describe a shared reality, not personality or cultural type.
- **Transcultural, not stereotypical.** It avoids fixed national packages and focuses on relationships, context and co-created commonalities.
- **Holistic and systematic.** It links strategy and governance with core processes and everyday behaviours.
- **Behaviourally anchored.** It uses maturity descriptions and reflection prompts rather than context-free ratings.
- **Dialogue to action.** It turns variation between answers into two or three owned priorities and a development route.
- **Modular and repeatable.** Teams can use the complete profile or a single dimension, then revisit it after implementation.

In a nutshell:

- The SAT exists because inclusive values on paper do not automatically become consistent decisions, routines and behaviours.
- It is a mirror rather than an audit: participants describe current reality, and differences between their answers become material for dialogue.
- It assesses 26 subcategories across three dimensions — purpose, process and practices — so that gaps between stated intent and lived experience become visible.
- Three maturity stages, Recognise, Connect and Leverage, describe the dominant pattern in each area. An organisation can sit at different stages in different areas.
- The tool is organisational rather than personal, behaviourally anchored, modular and designed to move from dialogue to action.
- Piloting with 36 organisations produced formative evidence and shaped the final version.

Key takeaways: The SAT does not measure how good an organisation is at diversity. It creates the grounds for a shared, evidence-based conversation about how purpose, systems and everyday behaviour actually fit together — and about which two or three things would make the most difference next.

Where this leads: Knowing what the tool is designed to do is only half of the picture. The next chapter turns to the process that makes it work.

Chapter 5: How does the SAT work?

What to expect from this chapter: The value of the SAT comes from the quality of reflection and follow-through, not from the result alone. This chapter sets out the six-step process that keeps the work focused, the two formats in which the tool can be run, the response rules that improve data quality, and the structure of the debrief conversation where assessment becomes development. It closes with guidance on reading results responsibly and a quick-start checklist.

5.1 The six-step process



The SAT's six-step process

Define the scope: Decide whether you are assessing the whole organisation, one function, a site or a team. Name the decision or development need that the assessment should inform.

Assemble multiple perspectives:

Invite a cross-functional group and appoint a process owner. Where possible use a neutral facilitator, especially when hierarchy, conflict or sensitive topics may shape the discussion.

Create safe conditions: Explain confidentiality, how the data will be used, and that the SAT is not a

performance appraisal. Ask for evidence from current practice rather than aspirational answers or policy language. [Part 1, Chapter 3.2](#) covers this ground in detail, including how to prepare a team before self-assessment and a mini-checklist for judging whether the team is ready.

Complete the assessment:

Participants select one maturity description for each relevant item. Individual reflection before group discussion reduces conformity pressure. Modular completion is appropriate when the full scope is not needed.

Compare patterns: Review the levels, the examples and the spread of answers. Averages help visualise the profile, but disagreement between roles or teams is often more useful than the mean.

Prioritise and act: Choose two or three areas with strategic relevance and realistic ownership. For each, define a small behavioural or system change, an owner, the evidence that would show progress, and a review date.

5.2 Two practical formats

Online SAT: Useful for structured participation, aggregation and repeated use. The portal supports a common assessment process; available features may depend on the session or account configuration.

Facilitator-led: Useful in workshops, for partial modules, or where participants need more context. Responses can be recorded as Recognise = 1, Connect = 2 and Leverage = 3 in order to map patterns.

Facilitator support: The ELEVATE Facilitator Guide

A separate ELEVATE Facilitator Guide is available for people using the SAT in their own organisation. It covers preparing the process,

choosing participants, creating safe conditions, leading the debrief, interpreting different response patterns and translating results into action. It is particularly recommended for first-time facilitators and for assessments involving hierarchy or sensitive topics.

5.3 Response rules that improve data quality

Here is a list of possible rules to improve quality of the discussion and collection of data:

- Choose one stage per item and answer for the defined organisational scope.
- Describe what usually happens now, not what should happen or what a policy promises.
- Where practice is mixed, choose the dominant pattern and note the important differences.
- Use concrete examples. “We communicate well” is weaker evidence than a repeated routine or a specific decision.
- Use “not applicable” sparingly and explain why the area falls outside the selected scope.

5.4 The debrief: where assessment becomes development

Allow at least three to four hours for a facilitated debriefing conversation when using the full tool. A shorter session may be enough for a single dimension. Throughout, the facilitator makes space for quieter voices, asks for evidence, and keeps the discussion on systems and

behaviours rather than on stereotypes or blame.

Pause and reflect: *Think of a recent organisational discussion about how people work together. Which of these four phases did it reach – and where did it stop*

Phase	Purpose	Prompts
Notice	Read the profile without solving it.	What stands out? Where is there alignment? Where is the widest spread?
Understand	Explore evidence and different viewpoints.	What examples support each view? Whose experience may be missing? What system reinforces this pattern?
Choose	Select a small number of priorities.	Which two or three areas matter most to our goals, people and stakeholders? What is within our influence?
Commit	Turn insight into accountable action.	What will change in behaviour or process? Who owns it? What evidence and review date will show progress?

5.5 How to read the results responsibly

These guidelines describe how to interpret the maturity profile in practice, so that the scores are read as a starting point for dialogue rather than as a final verdict.

- Look for patterns across purpose, process and practices, not only at the overall average.
- Treat differences between functions, hierarchy levels or sites as diagnostic clues rather than errors to eliminate.

- Distinguish a low stage caused by missing systems from one caused by inconsistent implementation.
- Pair scores with examples, because the same number can represent very different organisational realities.
- Do not use the profile as a psychometric test, a certification, compliance proof or an external benchmark.

Illustrative example

A wide spread on the item “Onboarding” may reveal a consistent formal process alongside real differences in how newcomers are welcomed in particular teams. A useful priority here is a shared routine: agreeing how onboarding is updated as the organisation changes – new roles, new markets, new strategic goals.

5.6 From diagnosis to development

The SAT reveals the grounds for a broader learning journey. Its output should feed a focused development plan rather than a long wish list. Select two or three priorities and connect them to relevant ELEVATE Learning Path activities, workplace experiments or internal improvement work. The template below can be used to record each priority.

Reassessment. Repeat the relevant areas only once there has been enough time to implement and observe change. An annual organisational review is a practical default; shorter workplace experiments can be reviewed sooner using qualitative evidence.

For how these priorities become the focus of a team’s Learning Journey, see [Part 3, Chapter 7](#).

5.7 Quick-start checklist

- ✓ The organisational scope and purpose are explicit.
- ✓ The group includes different functions, roles and lived perspectives.
- ✓ Confidentiality and the use of results are clear.
- ✓ Participants answer for current practice and bring examples.
- ✓ The debrief reviews both averages and disagreement.
- ✓ Two or three priorities have owners, evidence and review dates.

You may use the following table to map your priorities.

Priority	Small change	Owner	Evidence	Review date

In a nutshell:

- A six-step process — define scope, assemble perspectives, create safe conditions, complete the assessment, compare patterns, prioritise and act — keeps the work focused.
- The SAT can be run online or facilitator-led, and both formats support modular use.
- Response rules matter: describing what usually happens, rather than what policy promises, is what makes the data usable.
- The debrief moves through four phases: notice, understand, choose, commit. Stopping before *commit* is the most common way the process fails.
- Results are read as patterns rather than averages, and always paired with examples.
- The SAT's output is two or three owned priorities, which become the bridge into the Learning Path.

Key takeaways: The assessment is the easy part. What determines whether anything changes is the quality of the debrief and the discipline of the follow-through: a small number of priorities, each with an owner, visible evidence and a date.

Where this leads: The process only works, however, if the person leading it can hold the conversation. The next chapter turns to the facilitator.

Chapter 6: The SAT — what to be aware of as a facilitator

What to expect from this chapter: Facilitating a SAT conversation is not the same as administering a questionnaire. Participants are describing their own organisation, often in the presence of colleagues who see it differently and of managers whose decisions are part of the pattern under discussion.

This chapter sets out the pitfalls that recur most often and how to guard against them, a bank of prompts for opening the conversation, handling disagreement and closing safely, and the barriers that can prevent a good assessment from becoming organisational change.

Part 1, Chapter 3.3 describes what facilitator readiness involves before a journey begins. This chapter is about conduct during the assessment itself.

6.1 Common pitfalls and safeguards

Pitfall	Safeguard
HR completes the tool alone.	Broaden participation so that operational and lived-experience perspectives are present.
People score the policy, not the reality.	Ask “what happened the last time?” and request a concrete example.
The average hides disagreement.	Always review the distribution and discuss the widest gaps rather than smoothing them.
National culture becomes the explanation.	Return the conversation to context, relationships, roles, power, routines and organisational systems.
“Leverage” is treated as perfect.	Frame it as an intentional, renewable practice rather than a permanent label.

The workshop ends with insight only.

Close with owners, actions, evidence and a review date.

6.2 A question bank for trust, openness and honest reflection

The prompts below are grouped by the moment at which they are useful. They are offered as a resource to draw on rather than a script to follow.

Opening the conversation

- “There are no good or bad people behind these stages. We are describing a current pattern, not judging anyone.”
- “It is acceptable not to know. What would we need to observe or ask in order to answer this more confidently?”

When responses differ

- “Different answers are useful data. Let us understand what each person is seeing before we decide anything.”
- “Before we settle on a level, what examples support each view?”
- “People in different roles may experience this practice differently. Let us make room for that.”

Protecting the group

- “Let us stay with patterns, situations and behaviours rather than naming individuals.”
- “We have heard several perspectives. Who sees this differently, or has not yet had the chance to speak?”

Moving from reflection to action

- “Of everything we have discussed, which two or three areas would make the most difference?”
- “What is the smallest change that would be noticeable within a month?”
- “Who owns this, and how will we know whether it is working?”

Pause and reflect: Which of these prompts would be hardest to use in the organisations you work with? What does that tell you about where the real work lies?

6.3 Potential barriers and how to respond to them

Potential barriers or critical situations

Possible ways to respond

<i>Participants treat the assessment as a performance review and answer defensively.</i>	Separate the process from appraisal explicitly and visibly; agree at the outset how results will and will not be used.
<i>Senior presence in the room suppresses candour.</i>	Use individual reflection before group discussion; consider separate sessions by level where hierarchy is likely to dominate
<i>The group reaches agreement quickly and superficially.</i>	Slow the conversation with requests for evidence; treat rapid consensus as a signal rather than a success.
<i>Sensitive language creates anxiety and inhibits direct conversation.</i>	Create psychologically and socially safe conditions in which different interpretations can be voiced without forcing people into fixed categories.
<i>The profile becomes the goal, and the conversation stops at the score.</i>	Keep returning to the debrief questions; the profile is the starting point of the discussion, not its conclusion.

In a nutshell:

- Facilitating the SAT means holding a conversation in which people describe their own organisation, often in front of colleagues who see it differently.
- The recurring pitfalls are predictable, and each has a straightforward safeguard.
- Prompts for opening, for handling disagreement, for protecting the group and for moving to action can be prepared in advance.
- Barriers are as much organisational as interpersonal: defensiveness, hierarchy, superficial consensus and the absence of follow-through.
- The facilitator's central task is to keep the discussion on systems and behaviours, and to make sure the session ends in commitments rather than insight alone.

Key takeaways: The facilitator does not decide what the organisation's maturity profile means. Their work is to make it safe enough to say what people actually see and structured enough that what is said leads to a change in practices.

Best practice in implementing the SAT

What to expect in this section:

This section is intended to give the floor to the people who piloted the SAT: the organisations that carried out the self-assessment and the teams that went through the related training. At the time of writing, quotations are available from one pilot organisation, de Reso (Luxembourg), and are reproduced here without naming individuals.

The accounts that follow trace three aspects of the piloting experience: how organisations prepared for the assessment, who took part and why that breadth mattered, and what followed once the assessment closed.

What preparation made possible:

Organisations that named a concrete decision the assessment should inform reported more useful discussions than those that assessed in general. The Luxembourg pilot described this as one of the tool's main strengths:

"The tool helps identify pain points and next steps."

"[The tool's] focus on leveraging cultural diversity and going beyond, towards transcultural competence and development of commonalities, offered an immediate opportunity to reflect on key issues we often overlook in the daily rush and resource constraints of our organisations. It also highlighted improvements and practical tools we can soon integrate into our management processes – a valuable step towards continuous growth and inclusion."

Pilot participant, de Reso (Luxembourg) · contributed anonymously

Why breadth of participation

mattered: Cross-functional groups produced the disagreements that turned out to be most informative – and it was this breadth, more than the number of participants, that came through most clearly in how participants described the training:

"I thought that I was alone; this training helped me understand that I wasn't."

"It helped me understand shared problems."

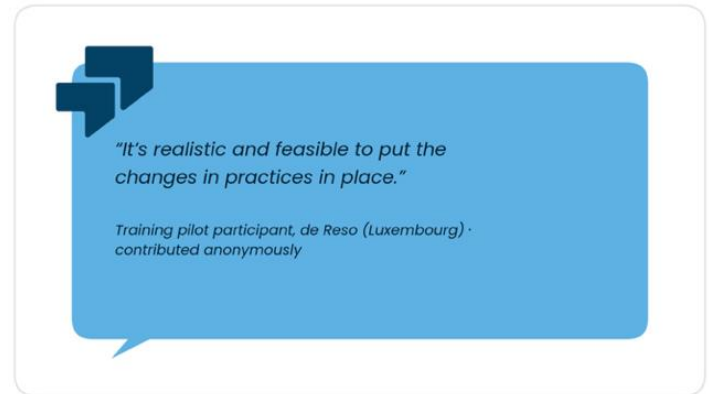
"I left with a better understanding of what we have in common, beyond differences."

"This training could benefit the whole team."

Training pilot participants, de Reso (Luxembourg) · contributed anonymously

Asked what created the strongest impact, participants pointed to two moments that grew directly out of this breadth: a moment of open sharing by one participant, which helped surface the real culture and the real issues in the organisation; and an exercise in which the group came to understand the real contributions of team members, beyond their official role descriptions.

Where follow-through made the difference: Assessments that closed with owners, evidence and review dates were the ones that produced observable change. Participants described the assessment as rigorous enough to support that kind of follow-through. And, importantly, as leading to change that felt achievable rather than aspirational:



Taken together, these early accounts point in the same three directions as the piloting more broadly: that preparation, breadth and follow-through are what turn an assessment into a useful one. They should be read as first impressions from a single pilot rather than as the full survey findings, which will allow these directions to be tested and developed further across all pilot organisations.

Knowing where an organisation stands is only the beginning: Part III turns to how that knowledge becomes everyday practice, through the ELEVATE Learning Path and E-Learning Space.

Part III

Learn: the ELEVATE Learning Path and E-Learning Space

[Part 1](#) established why a shift in perspective is needed and what readiness requires. [Part 2](#) introduced the tool that shows an organisation where it stands. Part 3 is about what happens next: how a team actually changes the way it works together.

The four chapters that follow build on one another. [Chapter 7](#) explains what the ELEVATE methodology and Learning Path are, and why they are designed as they are. [Chapter 8](#) sets out how the Learning Path works — its three phases and the four developmental stages at its centre. [Chapter 9](#) turns to the facilitator's conduct during the journey. [Chapter 10](#) addresses what happens after the facilitated sessions end.

The ELEVATE E-Learning Space, the digital environment that is part of the Learning Path and carries individual learning between team sessions, is tackled in [Part 4](#) of this handbook (Chapters 11 to 13).

Chapter 7: What is the ELEVATE Learning Path?

What to expect from this chapter: This chapter introduces the ELEVATE Learning Path and explains what distinguishes it from more traditional approaches to intercultural learning and team development.

7.1 A closer look: The ELEVATE methodology

ELEVATE is not a collection of exercises, and it is not a traditional intercultural training programme.

The methodology positions learning as a continuous developmental process. It can be defined as:

A structured team-development methodology that combines a kick-off session based on the Self-Assessment Tool, at least three facilitated team sessions, digital learning and individual reflection in the E-Learning Space, and transfer activities in everyday work — in order to help teams

turn diversity into sustainable collaboration practices.

Five characteristics distinguish it from most of the “classical” approaches.

First, the primary unit of development is the team rather than the individual. Individual learning remains important, but sustainable collaboration depends on the team’s collective capability to observe itself, learn together and keep improving. *For why the team is the unit of learning, see [Part 1, Chapter 2](#).*

Second, the facilitator does not deliver content. ELEVATE does not teach intercultural communication models. Instead the facilitator helps the team make its existing diversity and collaboration dynamics visible, ensures all voices are heard, and guides the team to reflect on its patterns, build shared understanding and co-create new practices and rituals.

Third, learning extends well beyond the workshop. Facilitated sessions are one element within a broader architecture that also includes structured reflection and digital learning in the E-Learning Space, workplace experimentation, peer support and learning transfer.

Pause and reflect: *In your organisation, what currently counts as evidence that a learning intervention worked?*

If the answer is a feedback form, what would you have to start noticing instead?

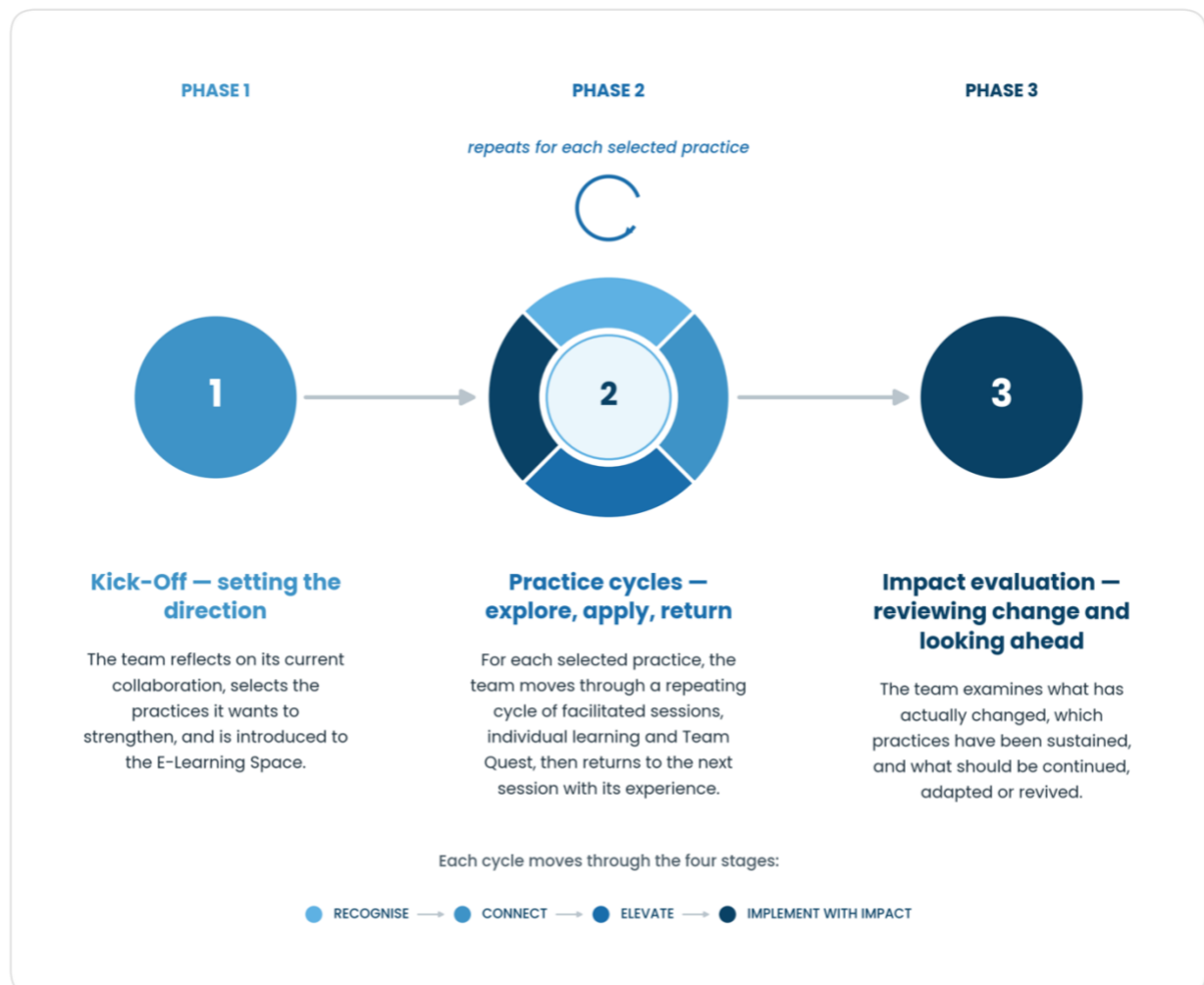
Fourth, the methodology draws on established learning research — experiential learning (Kolb & Kolb 2009, 2017), practice-based learning (Wenger et al, 2015), action learning (Revans, 1982), learning transfer (Weinbauer-Heidel, 2016), transformative learning (Jurkova & Guo, 2018) and relational learning (Grünfelder et al., 2024). Participants do not simply discuss collaboration. They experience it, analyse it, experiment with new behaviours and evaluate the effects in their everyday work.

Fifth, sustainable behavioural change is the measure of success. The attention shifts from delivering an excellent workshop towards enabling change that lasts. Success is therefore not measured by participant satisfaction immediately after a session, but by the extent to which teams continue applying, refining and sustaining new collaboration practices over time.

Taken together, facilitated dialogue, workplace experimentation, digital reflection and continuous transfer form an integrated learning ecosystem, designed to strengthen both a team's collaboration and its longer-term capacity for learning.

7.2 What is the ELEVATE Learning Path?

The Learning Path is how the methodology unfolds over time. It is organised into three phases, with a repeating practice cycle at its centre. The facilitated sessions are important milestones in this journey, but they are not its centre. Much of the learning happens between them, as teams test new behaviours and rituals under real working conditions.



The ELEVATE Learning Path

7.3 How the Learning Path connects to the SAT

The Kick-Off session begins from the team's own reflection on its collaboration. Where an organisation has completed the SAT, that maturity profile provides the starting point: One instrument, two scopes: The SAT can be used at organisational level, across all three dimensions, to see how purpose, process and practices fit together — the use described in this chapter. It can also be used at team level, working only with the Practices dimension: the everyday practices a team can change directly. That is how the ELEVATE Learning Path begins. See [Part 3, Chapter 7](#).

At team level, the reflection focuses on seven practices — the areas of everyday collaboration that a team can change directly, corresponding to the *Practices* dimension of the SAT described in [Chapter 2](#).

While the ELEVATE Self-Assessment Tool (SAT) evaluates 26 subcategories across three broad dimensions to provide a holistic, strategic audit of the entire

organisation, the team-level Learning Path is designed to focus strictly on the team's own daily functioning and relational habits. Relational practices are the areas where team members possess direct agency and immediate operational control, unlike the broader organisational systems in the Purpose and Process dimensions, which typically require top-down policy changes or strategic mandates.

To ensure the Kick-Off diagnostic remains highly actionable and team-focused, the nine subcategories of the SAT's Practices dimension are consolidated into seven core team practices. Specifically, the leadership-centric subcategories ("Leadership Style & Empowerment" and "Leadership Communication & Feedback") are not treated as isolated modules. Instead, they are woven as cross-cutting themes directly into the seven team practices (such as Feedback and Accountability), allowing the team to examine leadership behaviours as an integrated part of their daily collaborative pattern.

Teams select their three priorities from the following seven practices:

Practice	What it is about
Team communication norms	Shared guidelines for interaction that support clarity, respect and constructive disagreement.
Accountability and performance dialogue	Clear and fair accountability structures that enable learning instead of blame.
Feedback	Timely, constructive and actionable feedback supporting growth, development and inclusive performance.
Transcultural learning	Daily reflection and knowledge sharing that spread transcultural competence through the team.
Collaboration across teams and sites	Cross-team collaboration that multiplies innovation, cohesion and belonging.
Conflict resolution and constructive disagreement	Managing disagreement constructively to enable creativity, trust and inclusive problem-solving.
Onboarding of new team members	Welcoming newcomers with clear guidance on communication norms, decision-making habits and feedback styles, shaping belonging, performance and retention.

In a nutshell:

- The ELEVATE methodology treats learning as a continuous developmental process rather than a single training event.
- Its five defining characteristics are the team as the unit of development, facilitation rather than content delivery, learning beyond the workshop, a grounding in experiential and transfer research, and sustainable behavioural change as the measure of success.
- The Learning Path organises the methodology into three phases, with a repeating practice cycle at its centre.
- The facilitated sessions are milestones, not the centre; the work happens between them.
- Teams choose three practices to focus on from seven, drawn from the everyday collaboration areas the SAT assesses.

Key takeaways: The methodology explains *why* ELEVATE is built as it is: the team is the unit that learns, and change is judged by what continues after the facilitator has gone. The Learning Path is *how* that plays out across a team's journey.

Where this leads: Knowing the shape of the journey is one thing. The next chapter follows it phase by phase.

Chapter 8: How does the Learning Path work?

What to expect from this chapter: This chapter follows the Learning Path from beginning to end. You will see what happens in the Kick-Off session, how the practice cycle repeats for each selected practice, and what the impact evaluation examines at the close.

At the centre of the chapter are the four developmental stages that structure every facilitated session – RECOGNISE, CONNECT, ELEVATE and IMPLEMENT WITH IMPACT – and the developmental logic that explains why they run in this order.

8.1 Phase 1 • Kick-Off: setting the direction

The Learning Path begins with a Kick-Off session in which the team reflects on its transcultural competence across the seven practices set out in [Chapter 7](#). The facilitator can use the digital SAT, guide the reflection through a presentation, or choose another suitable method to help the team identify and agree the three practices it wants to focus on.

At the end of the session, participants are introduced to the E-Learning Space (see [Part 4](#) of this handbook) and invited to explore the Library and make their first entries in the Learning Journal – reflections on the Kick-Off experience, for example. They can begin the modules once the facilitator has set up the three practices the team has chosen.

For how to configure the platform, see [Chapter 13](#).

8.2 Phase 2 • Practice cycles: explore, apply, return

For each selected practice, the team moves through a repeating cycle, including facilitated sessions, Team Quests and individual learning within the E-Learning Space.

The facilitated sessions

Each session opens with an introduction in which the facilitator sets the scene and builds the foundations of psychological safety. In the second and third sessions, we recommend beginning with reflection on the previous Team Quest and on the learning that has taken place at both individual and team level.

Once the team is ready to turn to the next practice, members enter the E-Learning Space to reflect on

its current state and complete the pre-assessment. This reflection provides a starting point for conversation about current behaviours, existing habits and collaboration patterns. Logging into the platform is also a good moment for the facilitator to explain the next steps and remind participants of the tools available to support their learning.

The team then works through the four stages of ELEVATE: **RECOGNISE, CONNECT, ELEVATE, IMPLEMENT.**

The session closes with a round of reflection and appreciation. Facilitators can design this freely, using their own preferred closing method or the exercise provided in the ELEVATE slide deck. Closing well creates a positive emotional tone, strengthens connection within the team and reinforces commitment to the next steps — all of which support the team's willingness to keep applying what it has learned.

Between sessions: individual learning and the Team Quest

This is where the real work begins.

The team has to integrate new practices and rituals into its daily work for the learning to last. New rituals must survive busy

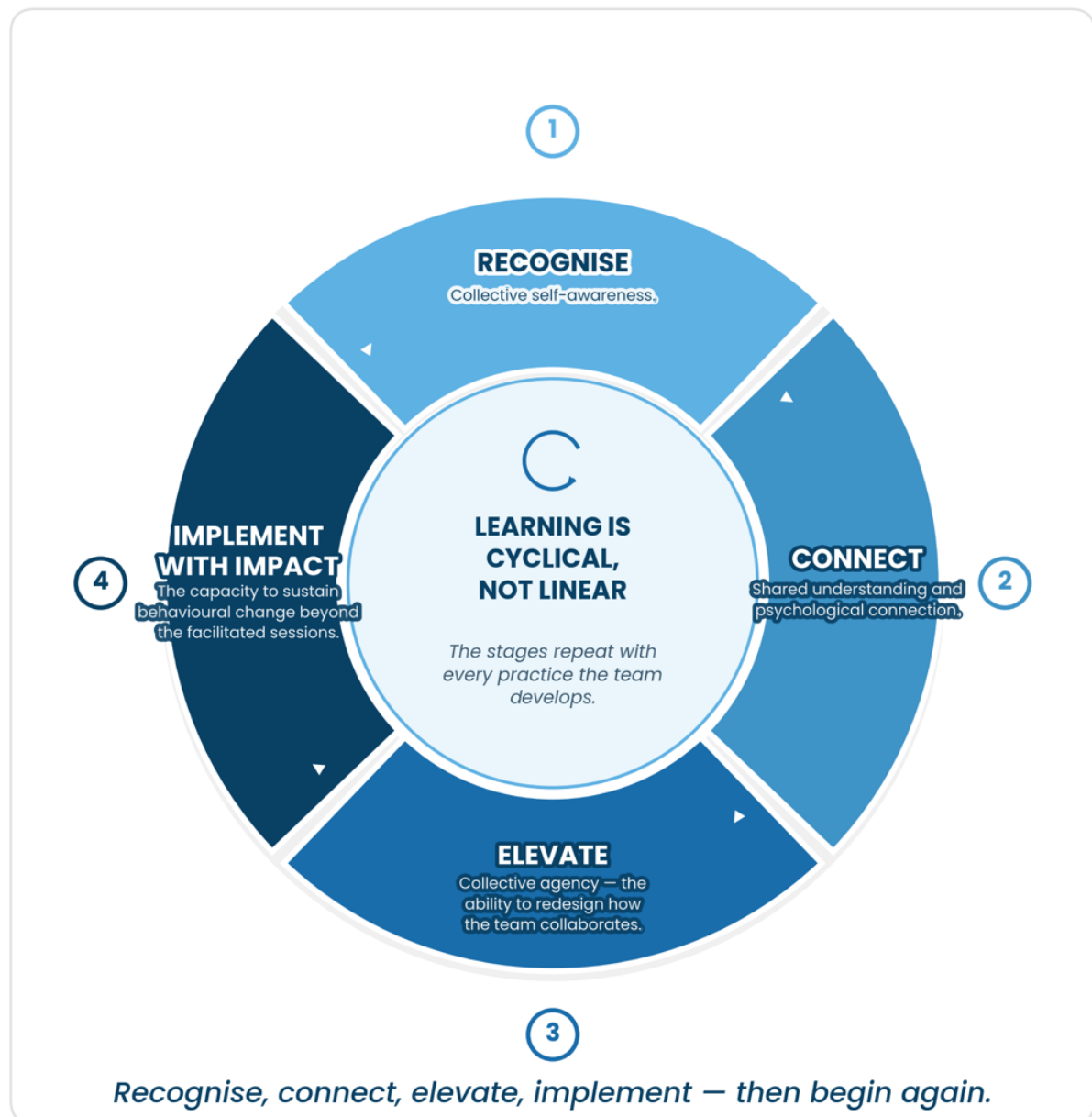
schedules, new practices must hold under pressure, and new meeting formats must remain meaningful when deadlines become demanding.

The content in the E-Learning Space helps team members deepen their understanding of the practice they are working on. In the Team Quest section, members hold one another accountable by tracking progress and sharing reflections and comments, and can add images to the Team Journal. *For the elements of the platform and how a team meets them, see [Chapter 12](#).*

It matters that the facilitator monitors the team's progress on the platform regularly and follows up with the team leader. This sustains momentum, reinforces accountability and supports the team's continued willingness to transfer learning into practice.

Pause and reflect: *Think of a change your team agreed in the last year that did not survive. What happened in the weeks after the decision — and what would have had to be different?*

8.3 The four developmental stages



The developmental stages of the ELEVATE Learning Path

At first glance the four stages look like a sequence of workshop modules. That reading would miss the point of the methodology.

The stages are not independent activities that can be combined in any order. They represent a deliberate developmental sequence through which a team progressively strengthens its

capacity to collaborate across differences. Each stage develops a different collective capability, and each creates the conditions for the next.

The Learning Path reflects a simple observation from organisational life. Teams rarely fail because people lack technical expertise. More often they struggle because

they never develop a shared understanding of how they work together, and continue repeating familiar interaction patterns without noticing them.

Misunderstandings accumulate, assumptions remain unquestioned, and ineffective routines gradually become normal.

Improving collaboration therefore begins well before discussing solutions. Before a team can change how it works, it first needs to see how it currently works.

The four stages apply the transcultural learning process introduced in [Part 1, Chapter 2](#): recognising complexity, identifying the commonalities that already exist, and developing new ones with implementing them to create a broader impact that goes beyond the workplace.

RECOGNISE — developing collective self-awareness

Participants are invited to recognise the diverse perspectives, experiences, identities, expertise and cultural influences that each person brings to the team in relation to the practice the team has chosen to work on.

When uniqueness remains invisible, teams underestimate the resources already available within

the group. Members may unconsciously assume that others interpret situations in similar ways, or hold comparable experiences and expectations. Differences then become visible only once misunderstandings emerge. Recognising uniqueness makes diversity visible before it becomes a problem.

The stage then extends beyond individual introductions. As participants become more familiar with one another, attention shifts towards the team itself, and members are invited to describe their patterns of collaboration within the chosen practice. Which voices dominate conversations? How are decisions made? How is disagreement expressed? Who provides support? How is knowledge shared? What assumptions appear to guide the team's interactions?

At this point the facilitator introduces an important shift. The objective is not to analyse individual personalities but to observe the system. Instead of asking "why does this person always interrupt?", teams are encouraged to ask "what pattern of interaction is emerging in our collaboration?"

This distinction is fundamental. Patterns belong to the team rather

than to individuals. Once teams begin recognising patterns instead of attributing behaviour to personalities, collaboration becomes something they can collectively influence.

Awareness alone, however, does not create change. Teams may accurately recognise their differences and patterns while continuing to experience tension. Something else is needed before they are ready to redesign how they work: they need to discover what genuinely connects them.

CONNECT — building common ground without erasing difference

Many facilitation approaches move directly from recognising diversity to establishing shared values or objectives. ELEVATE takes a different route. Rather than asking teams to search for similarity, participants explore something that exists at a deeper level: shared needs.

People may differ considerably in their beliefs, communication styles, professional backgrounds, national cultures or preferred ways of working. Yet beneath these differences they often seek remarkably similar conditions in order to collaborate well — trust, respect, clarity, autonomy, learning, growth, psychological safety. The strategies for meeting these needs differ across

individuals and cultures, but the needs themselves provide a powerful foundation for dialogue.

Insights from Research: This stage draws on the work of Marshall Rosenberg (2015) and the principles of Nonviolent Communication, particularly the insight that recognising universal human needs creates opportunities for empathy without requiring agreement or similarity. Within ELEVATE, shared needs become the bridge between individual uniqueness and collective collaboration.

The conversation therefore changes. Instead of asking “how are we different?”, teams begin asking “what do we all need in order to work well together and improve this practice?”

The shift has significant consequences. Differences stop being obstacles to overcome and become different ways of meeting shared needs. The atmosphere in the team often changes noticeably. Participants recognise that although they approach situations differently, many of their underlying aspirations are similar. Trust becomes easier to establish, because people experience one another less as representatives of different cultures or professional identities and more as colleagues

pursuing common goals under different conditions.

CONNECT does not eliminate difference. It identifies enough common ground for difference to become productive.

ELEVATE — from reflection to collective agency

Understanding how a team collaborates does not automatically change its practices. By the end of CONNECT, participants have a richer understanding of one another and common ground rooted in shared needs. This is an essential foundation, but it does not yet alter everyday practice. Teams often leave reflective sessions with greater awareness and stronger relationships, only to return to familiar routines once daily pressures resume.

The methodology deliberately prevents this. The ELEVATE stage is the moment at which reflection becomes intentional action.

Rather than asking participants to solve every challenge they have identified, facilitators encourage teams to focus on a small number of collaboration practices that are both meaningful and realistically achievable. **The emphasis is not on generating numerous ideas. It is on making conscious choices.** This distinction matters. Many

improvement initiatives fail because teams attempt to change too many behaviours at once. New practices compete with existing routines, priorities shift, enthusiasm declines and little changes. ELEVATE instead encourages teams to identify one or two practices that would make the greatest difference if they were sustained consistently over time.

The facilitator's attention therefore shifts from diagnosis to design. What kind of team do we want to become? Which collaboration practices would help us work better together? What would people actually experience differently if these practices became part of everyday work?

These questions move the conversation beyond abstract aspiration. Rather than producing general statements such as "we want better communication" or "we should trust each other more", teams begin defining observable behaviours. Instead of discussing feedback as a desirable value, they design new ways of giving and requesting it. Instead of agreeing that knowledge sharing matters, they create routines through which knowledge is actually exchanged. Instead of hoping meetings become more

inclusive, they redesign the meeting.

This movement from values to practices is one of the defining characteristics of the methodology. Practices make culture visible.

Organisational culture is often described through values, beliefs or assumptions. Those perspectives are valuable, but team members experience culture primarily through everyday interaction. Culture becomes tangible in repeated behaviours, shared routines and informal rituals that gradually shape expectations about how things are done here. ELEVATE therefore treats collaboration practices as the building blocks of team culture.

Changing culture does not begin by attempting to change people's personalities or beliefs. It begins by intentionally changing what the team repeatedly does together.

The practices developed at this stage may appear small: introducing regular feedback conversations, rotating who facilitates meetings, checking assumptions before decisions, creating space for quieter voices, establishing new ways of welcoming new members. Individually, none of these

transforms a team. Repeated consistently, they gradually reshape how the team interacts.

The stage therefore develops something beyond problem-solving. It develops collective agency: the recognition that collaboration is not simply something that happens to a team, but something it can intentionally design, observe and improve. Instead of adapting to an existing team culture, participants begin to see themselves as active contributors to it.

IMPLEMENT WITH IMPACT – sustaining behavioural change

Many development programmes conclude with an action plan. ELEVATE concludes with a transfer strategy in the form of a Team Quest

The distinction reflects a principle of the ELEVATE methodology that is running through the whole handbook: meaningful learning is measured not by what participants understand during a session but by what they continue doing afterwards.

At this stage, collaboration practices are translated into concrete transfer goals – a Team Quest. Unlike traditional learning objectives, transfer goals describe observable behaviours and team practices that participants intend

to sustain over time. They answer practical questions. What exactly will we do differently? When, and how often? How will we know whether we are succeeding? How will we review and adapt as we learn?

The purpose is not to create accountability through control. It is to create commitment through clarity. Behavioural change becomes considerably more likely when intentions are translated into concrete actions embedded in existing work routines. Transfer goals are therefore deliberately simple, specific and directly connected to the practices designed in the previous stage.

Although every participant reflects on their own contribution, the primary unit of implementation

remains the team. This reflects the fundamental logic of the methodology: collaboration is produced collectively, and it can therefore only be sustained collectively. Team members support one another in implementing new practices, observe the effects and periodically reflect on what is working, what needs adjustment and what new insights have emerged.

Learning thus becomes cyclical rather than linear. Implementation generates new experience; experience generates reflection; reflection informs adaptation; adaptation strengthens future practice. Then the cycle begins again.

ELEVATE LEARNING PATH · FOUR STAGES

The developmental logic of the four stages

Viewed separately, each stage serves a distinct purpose. Viewed together, they form a coherent progression. Teams begin by developing awareness of themselves as a collaborative system. They then establish common ground without diminishing the diversity that makes collaboration valuable. Building on that foundation, they intentionally redesign their ways of working. Finally, they embed those practices in everyday routines so that learning continues beyond the facilitated sessions.

The sequence is intentional, and relational:

- Recognising uniqueness without creating connection may increase awareness without strengthening collaboration.
- Connecting without redesigning collaboration may build trust without generating meaningful change.
- Designing new practices without implementation may produce inspiration that quickly disappears.
- Implementing without the earlier stages risks reinforcing behaviours that have never been consciously examined.

Each stage prepares the conditions for the next. The Learning Path should therefore be understood as four interconnected developmental capacities that teams build together.

Holding this sequence is an important part of the facilitator's work. Facilitators will meet teams that rush towards solutions, avoid discussing differences and commonalities, or remain in analysis without moving to action. Recognising when these tendencies disrupt the developmental logic – and protecting the logic without becoming rigid – is a core facilitation task. Moving too quickly tends to produce superficial solutions, practices based on individual preference rather than shared need, or changes that prove difficult to sustain.

This perspective also explains why ELEVATE places the team, rather than the individual, at the centre. Individuals undoubtedly learn along the way: they become more self-aware, develop new perspectives and strengthen their own transcultural competence, and these outcomes often extend well beyond the workplace. But the primary ambition is different. It is to improve how people learn, collaborate and create value together.

Remember that transcultural competence is not demonstrated by what individual team members know or believe. It becomes visible in the quality of a team's everyday interactions, its ability to learn from difference, its willingness to keep improving and its capacity to turn diversity into stronger collaboration (Weinbauer-Heidel 2016).

Pause and Reflect: Where is your team right now: still discovering its patterns, building trust, designing new practices, or sustaining them in everyday work — and what would it cost to skip ahead?

8.5 Phase 3 • Impact evaluation: reviewing change and looking ahead

The impact evaluation session assesses what has actually changed within the team as a result of the Learning Journey, what supported those changes and what made implementation difficult. The focus is on observable behavioural and team-level change, and the session is an integral component of the Learning Path — rather than an optional follow-up.

The preferred format is a facilitated team session of 90 to 120 minutes, combining individual reflection with group discussion. It should take place **no earlier than three months after the intervention**, once teams have had sufficient opportunity to

implement, experience and refine their new practices.

Participants compare their experience before and after the journey across five areas: **team self-awareness, trust, growth and resilience, shared meanings and shared practices**. The first three are the core competences that underpin the Learning Journey, each forming one module of the E-Learning Space, and are explored further in [Part 3, Chapter 12](#). The last two are the commonalities described in [Part 1, Chapter 2](#) — which means the evaluation measures precisely what this handbook understands transcultural competence to focus on. Participants identify concrete examples of change, explore which areas changed least, and discuss the factors that enabled or hindered transfer into everyday work. A key part of the session is reviewing the practices and transfer goals developed during the journey: which are still in use, which have been abandoned, and which should be continued, adapted or revived.

In a nutshell:

- The Learning Path runs through three phases: a Kick-Off that sets direction, repeating practice cycles, and an impact evaluation.
- Each practice cycle combines a facilitated session with individual learning and a Team Quest in everyday work.
- Every facilitated session moves through four developmental stages, each building a different collective capability:
- The sequence is deliberate: skipping a stage does not prevent learning, but it changes the developmental logic the methodology rests on.
- Impact evaluation takes place no earlier than three months afterwards, and examines observable change across five areas

Key takeaways: The four stages are not a workshop agenda. They are four capabilities a team builds in order, each making the next one possible. Practices make culture visible — which is why ELEVATE changes what a team repeatedly does together rather than trying to change what its members believe or wish for.

Where this leads: Understanding the Learning Path is one thing. Holding it in a room full of people is another. The next chapter turns to the facilitator's conduct during the journey.

Chapter 9: The ELEVATE Learning Path — what to be aware of as a facilitator

What to expect from this chapter: Understanding the Learning Path is only the beginning. This chapter is about how facilitators guide teams through the journey while gradually transferring ownership of the learning process back to the team.

You will see why the facilitator's role is not to provide answers or solve the team's problems, but how facilitators make patterns visible without assigning blame, how they attend to psychological safety and participation, and how they use the E-Learning Space to extend reflection into everyday work.

Part 1, Chapter 3.3 sets out what facilitator readiness requires before a journey begins, through three Changes of Perspective. This chapter is about conduct during the journey itself.

9.1 What changes about facilitation

ELEVATE is not designed as a sequence of workshop activities but as a structured developmental process. The facilitator's responsibility is therefore not to lead participants from one exercise to the next, but to create and maintain the conditions in which collective learning can emerge.

This changes how success is judged. In traditional training, success is often measured by the quality of content delivery, participant satisfaction or the smooth execution of planned activities. Within ELEVATE, the facilitator succeeds when teams

become increasingly capable of observing their own collaboration, engaging in honest dialogue, experimenting with new ways of working and sustaining those changes long after the sessions have ended.

The facilitator is therefore neither an expert providing answers nor an observer standing apart from the process. They support the team's learning while gradually handing ownership of that learning back to the team.

9.2 Facilitating emergence rather than delivering solutions

One of the greatest challenges for experienced facilitators is resisting the temptation to solve the team's

problems. Participants frequently look to the facilitator for explanations, recommendations or confirmation that they are moving in the right direction. When uncertainty arises, facilitators may feel compelled to provide clarity by offering their own interpretations.

Within ELEVATE this impulse deserves caution. The objective is not for the facilitator to diagnose the team's collaboration, but for the team to develop the capacity to understand and improve it. Facilitators therefore spend less time explaining and more time inquiring. Questions gradually become more valuable than answers.

Rather than interpreting behaviour, facilitators invite participants to make sense of what they are observing. Rather than resolving disagreement, they create conditions in which it can be explored constructively. Rather than steering conversations towards predetermined conclusions, they encourage teams to investigate possibilities together. Rather than positioning themselves as knowing more about the team than its members do, they recognise that the team holds knowledge and experience which only genuine inquiry will surface.

This is not passive facilitation. Facilitating inquiry demands continuous attention: observing interaction patterns, noticing shifts in participation, recognising emotional dynamics, monitoring psychological safety and selecting questions that deepen reflection without imposing an interpretation. The quality of facilitation depends less on expertise than on creating the opportunity for a team to generate its own insight.

In transcultural teams, facilitators also remain alert to the possibility that differences in communication style, language proficiency, hierarchy, professional identity or cultural expectation are shaping participation. The purpose is not to explain behaviour through culture. It is to stay curious about the many contextual factors shaping a team's interactions while avoiding premature assumptions – which is what allows space for multiple interpretations rather than reinforcing stereotypes.

This is the same shift described in [Part 1, Chapter 3.3](#), as the move from categories to emergence.

Pause and reflect: *Think of the last time a group looked to you for an answer.*

What would have happened if you had asked a question instead — and what made that difficult?

9.3 Potential barriers and how to respond to them

Potential barriers or critical situations	Possible ways to respond
<i>The team rushes towards solutions before examining its patterns.</i>	Name the tendency without judgement and return to the current stage; explain briefly why the sequence matters.
<i>Participants avoid discussing differences, keeping the conversation comfortable.</i>	Work through shared needs rather than positions; use individual reflection before group discussion.
<i>The team remains in analysis and does not move to action.</i>	Shift from diagnosis to design with concrete questions: what would people experience differently, and starting when?
<i>Participants look to the facilitator as the expert on their collaboration.</i>	Redirect questions to the team; make the transfer of ownership explicit as a goal rather than a technique.
<i>Quieter members disengage while a few voices shape every discussion.</i>	Use structured rounds and written reflection; make participation patterns themselves an object of the team's attention.
<i>Momentum fades between sessions.</i>	Monitor progress in the E-Learning Space and follow up with the team leader; treat continuity as part of facilitation, not administration.

In a nutshell:

- The facilitator creates the conditions for learning rather than positioning themselves as the expert with the answers.
- Questions, inquiry and observation matter more than explanation and advice.
- Facilitators make interaction patterns visible while avoiding premature interpretation, blame or cultural stereotyping.
- Psychological safety and constructive challenge have to be balanced continuously.
- Protecting the developmental sequence of the four stages is a core facilitation task.
- Facilitation continues between sessions, through monitoring, follow-up and support for experimentation.

Key takeaways: Successful facilitation is not measured by how well the facilitator performs, but by the team's growing capacity to facilitate its own learning. The highest achievement is not dependence but autonomy.

Where this leads: Facilitation, however, has an end point. The next chapter turns to what makes learning last once it arrives.

Chapter 10: Sustaining learning beyond facilitation

What to expect from this chapter: Because ELEVATE is designed as a learning journey rather than a single intervention, lasting change depends on what happens between and after the facilitated sessions. This chapter looks at how reflection continues in the workplace, how transfer goals are reviewed, what role the E-Learning Space plays, and how ownership finally passes to the team.

10.1 Learning continues in the workplace

Between facilitated sessions, participants begin implementing the practices they have collectively designed. Some quickly become part of everyday work. Others meet obstacles, need adjustment or evolve in unexpected directions. These experiences are not interruptions to the learning process; they are an essential part of it.

Facilitators therefore encourage teams to remain curious about what happens rather than evaluating implementation simply as success or failure. Reflection continues through conversations within the team, periodic reviews of transfer goals and individual observations recorded throughout the implementation period.

Insights from Research on learning transfer consistently shows that lasting behavioural change depends far less on the quality of the learning event than on what happens before and after it (Weinbauer-Heidel, 2016). Motivation, organisational support, opportunities for practice, reflection, feedback and accountability all shape whether learning becomes embedded in everyday work. The Learning Path is built around this finding: new rituals need to survive busy schedules, new practices need to hold under pressure, and new meeting formats need to remain meaningful when deadlines become demanding.

10.2 The role of the E-Learning Space

The E-Learning Space supports this process by providing access to learning resources, AI-

supported reflection, opportunities to revisit transfer goals and space to document progress over time. Its purpose is not to replace facilitation. It extends the learning environment into participants' everyday professional practice, maintaining momentum between sessions and supporting the cycle of action, reflection and adaptation on which the methodology depends. [*Chapters 11 to 13 describe the platform in detail.*](#)

No digital platform, however, can sustain learning on behalf of a team. Only the team can do that. The platform supports the commitment; it cannot replace it.

10.3 Transferring ownership to the team

The facilitator's final task is to prepare the team for this transition by gradually handing over ownership of the learning process. Practically, this means the team takes on what the facilitator has been doing: noticing its own patterns, reviewing its own practices, deciding what to adjust and holding its own commitments.

Learning becomes cyclical rather than linear. Teams observe, experiment, reflect, adjust and learn — and then repeat. Over time this enables them not only to improve specific practices but to strengthen something more valuable: their collective capacity to keep learning together. That capacity may ultimately be the most significant outcome of the methodology.

Pause and reflect: *What would have to be true for your team to run its own version of this process in a year's time, without an external facilitator? Which part of it would be hardest to hold?*

Organisations, technologies and societal expectations will continue to change. New forms of diversity will emerge, and existing practices will need adaptation. Teams that can reflect collectively, learn continuously and intentionally redesign how they work will navigate that better than teams relying on fixed models or predefined solutions.

In a nutshell:

- Sustained change depends more on what happens after a session than on the session itself.
- Practices that meet obstacles or evolve are producing learning, not failing.
- The E-Learning Space extends reflection into everyday work but cannot sustain learning on a team's behalf.
- The facilitator's closing task is to transfer ownership, so the team continues the cycle of observation, experimentation, reflection and adaptation.
- The lasting outcome is not a set of practices but the team's capacity to keep developing them.

Key takeaways: The ambition is not to become indispensable to a team's development. It is to leave the team able to continue learning, adapting and improving long after the facilitator has gone.

Outlook: To support each participant's learning journey, the ELEVATE E-Learning Space was developed and will be explained in more detail in chapter 11. The ELEVATE E-Learning Space is part of the whole Learning path.

Chapter 11: What is the ELEVATE E-Learning Space?

What to expect from this chapter: The ELEVATE E-Learning Space extends the Learning Path during and between the facilitated sessions. This chapter introduces the ELEVATE E-Learning Space: why it exists, what it is for, and where it sits within the Learning Path. Chapters 12 and 13 then describe how it works and what facilitators need to be aware of when using it.

The ELEVATE Learning Space at a glance:

What	A digital learning environment supporting individual reflection and transfer between team sessions.
Who	Participants, with progress on selected elements visible to the facilitator.
When	Introduced at the Kick-Off; used throughout the Learning Journey.
Output	Individual reflection, tracked transfer goals and a shared record of team progress.

11.1 Why the E-Learning Space exists

The E-Learning Space is an integral part of the Learning Journey. It exists to extend learning beyond facilitated sessions and support the transfer of learning into everyday work. It provides an individual space in which participants reflect, explore and practise between team sessions, while staying connected to the practices the team has selected.

A central purpose is to develop **metacognitive skills**: the ability to

notice and question one's own assumptions, interpretations, reactions and behavioural patterns. Through scenarios, reflection questions, learning journals and transfer activities, participants move through a cycle of experience, noticing, interpretation, questioning, considering alternatives, experimenting and reflecting again. In this sense the E-Learning Space is not primarily a content platform. It is a metacognitive learning space that helps participants become more reflective, adaptable and

intentional in how they respond across different contexts.

Individual learning then feeds back into team development, supporting the emergence of more effective and sustainable transcultural practices.

The distinction matters for how a facilitator introduces it. The E-Learning Space is not an extension of the facilitated session; it is an extension of the learning process.

11.2 Where the E-Learning Space sits in the Learning Path

The platform is introduced during the Kick-Off session and accompanies the team throughout the journey. At the

Kick-Off, the team assesses its seven team practices and identifies the three with the greatest potential for improvement — those that would do most to unlock the value of its diversity and create ways of working in which every member can contribute. See [Chapter 8](#) for the Kick-Off session. The facilitator then configures these three selected practices in the team's space. From that point onwards they run as a continuous thread through the journey, connecting the facilitated sessions with participants' individual reflection, practice and experimentation in between.

In a nutshell:

- The E-Learning Space extends learning beyond the facilitated sessions and supports transfer into everyday work.
- Its central purpose is metacognitive: noticing and questioning one's own assumptions, interpretations and patterns.
- It is not primarily a content repository but a reflective learning environment.
- It is introduced at the Kick-Off and carries the team's three selected practices through the whole journey.

Key takeaways: The E-Learning Space is an extension of the learning process, not of the workshop. ..Sustainable transfer depends less on the platform than on the team's own commitment to continuous learning — the platform supports that commitment; it does not replace it. Sustainable transfer depends less on the platform than on the team's own commitment to continuous learning — the platform supports that commitment; it does not replace it.

Chapter 12: How does the ELEVATE E-Learning Space work?

What to expect from this chapter: This chapter walks through the platform in the order a participant meets it: the home page, the shape of a module, the assessments that open and close it, the four steps at its centre, and the shared and private spaces that support reflection and accountability.

12.1 What participants will find

The E-Learning Space has nine elements.

Element	What it is	Who can see it
Account settings	Name, language and password, plus data download and account deletion	Only the participant
My Journey	The home page: the three modules, each with progress and a Continue button	The participant; progress is also visible to the facilitator
Modules	Three, one per competence, each built as pre-assessment, a video overview, the four steps and post-assessment	The participant; completion visible to the facilitator and Admin
Team Quests	One quest per practice, holding the transfer goals the team tracks together. Created by the team leader	The whole team and the facilitator
Team Journal	A shared comment thread attached to each quest	The whole team
Learning Journal	A private notebook; reflections from the microlearning cards are saved here automatically	Only the participant
ChatBOT	An AI companion supporting reflection, available from any page	Only the participant

Library	Curated resources organised by competence	All users
Progress view	Module completion and quest activity	The facilitator and Admin

12.1 Practices and competences

The ELEVATE Learning Path works across two connected levels.

Practices are areas of everyday team collaboration that teams can directly work on and improve,

such as communication, feedback, accountability, transcultural learning or conflict resolution. They provide the concrete focus for a team's improvement work.

THE THREE COMPETENCES AS RELATIONAL ENABLERS OF THE LEARNING JOURNEY

In the ELEVATE methodology, Team Self-Awareness, Trust, and Resilience & Growth are understood as three core competences that form part of transcultural competence. At the same time, they play a particular role within the ELEVATE Learning Journey: they act as the foundational relational enablers through which teams can examine, develop, and transform their everyday ways of working.

ELEVATE distinguishes between team practices—the visible, everyday ways in which teams collaborate, such as feedback, onboarding, or conflict resolution—and the underlying transcultural competences that enable these practices to develop. The three core competences therefore should not be understood as a separate or parallel track. Rather, they provide the foundations that allow teams to engage meaningfully with their practices, search for commonalities, and co-create new ways of working.

Team Self-Awareness acts as the cognitive enabler. It allows the team to observe its own system from within, identify recurring interaction patterns, and recognise how assumptions, biases, and established habits shape collaboration before attempting to change them.

Trust acts as the relational enabler. It creates the psychological safety and mutual respect needed for team members to express vulnerability, explore differences, raise concerns, and speak openly when developing new commonalities.

Resilience & Growth acts as the adaptive enabler. It enables teams to respond to challenges, setbacks, and conflicts as opportunities for collective learning and to sustain and adapt new practices under real-world conditions.

The three competences therefore function both as **learning outcomes and as enablers of the learning process itself**. As they develop progressively, they strengthen the team's collective ability to observe, discuss, negotiate, experiment, and refine its ways of working.

In this sense, Team Self-Awareness, Trust, and Resilience & Growth form an important relational foundation for developing **transcultural competence as an ongoing team capability**.

The two levels are closely interconnected. Teams improve a selected practice by moving through the four ELEVATE steps: recognising the uniqueness and differences within the team, connecting around shared meaning and common needs, co-creating new and shared practices and rituals, and implementing concrete actions for lasting impact. Through this work, the competences are both engaged and developed. The practices give the work its concrete focus, while the competences provide the broader capabilities that support effective and sustainable collaboration. In the E-Learning Space, each selected practice has a module-specific pre- and post-assessment pair, with all three practice-based pairs remaining visible across the three modules.

The facilitator guides the team in deciding which of its three selected practices is addressed within each module.

My Journey – the home page: My Journey is the home page participants see after logging in. It displays the three modules as entry points into the learning journey. Each module brings together learning content centred on one of the three competences below. Through this content, participants work on their selected practices and develop the corresponding competence. **Team Self-Awareness** is the team's ability to recognise and understand its recurring interaction patterns, their impact on relationships, decisions and results, and to observe itself in real time.

Trust is the team's collective capability to build reliable, respectful and psychologically safe ways of working together through shared expectations, communication and the fulfilment of commitments, enabling cooperation and knowledge sharing.

uncertainty and setbacks by adapting, learning, supporting one another and turning experience into future development.

12.2 The shape of a module

Every module has the same four parts, in order, and each unlocks the next.

Resilience & Growth is the team's capacity to respond to challenges,

Part	What it is	Why it is there
Pre-assessment	A short assessment completed at the start of each module to establish participants' starting point in relation to the practice being strengthened. Statements are rated on two scales, agreement and frequency, and explore two perspectives: the team's patterns as the participant perceives them, and the participant's own awareness of those patterns.	Brings both perspectives into awareness; <i>about me</i> and <i>about my team</i> , and captures a starting point in relation to the practice being strengthened, before the session and learning content shape participants' thinking.
Why this matters	A video overview of the competence, the four steps and the wider framework.	Frames the competence within the methodology and introduces the thinking behind it.
The four steps	Recognise, Connect, ELEVATE and Implement, each with a learning objective, a scenario and a short series of microlearning cards. The Implement step also carries a video on implementing with impact.	The four steps are the core of the model and the outline the facilitated session itself follows.
Post-assessment	Statements corresponding to the pre-assessment of a particular practice, with the same structure and rating scales, answered after	Shows how participants' perspectives on the practice, their team's ways of working, and their own awareness of

	the module content and just before the next live session.	these dynamics have shifted through the module.
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The pre- and post-assessments belong to the module and to the individual. They are not the SAT, which assesses the organisation, nor the team-level reflection at the Kick-Off. *For the SAT, see [Part 2](#)*. The SAT and the Kick-Off reflection serve a diagnostic purpose: they help the organisation and the team identify and prioritise practices and areas for improvement, providing a basis for the facilitator to guide the Learning Path. The module pre- and post-assessments, by contrast, provide an individual self-assessment of participants' awareness of their team's patterns and dynamics in relation to a specific practice. They give each participant an opportunity to consider their own perspective on the practice and compare it before and after the module, making it possible to notice shifts in their perspectives, approach to the practice and awareness of these dynamics through the learning experience. Each module displays the pre- and post-assessment pairs for the team's three selected practices. The facilitator indicates which practice is the focus of the module and guides participants to the

corresponding assessment. While the same practice may appear across all three modules, its assessment statements are tailored to the competence on which each module is centred. For example, the pre- and post-assessment statements for **Feedback** in the Team Self-Awareness module are different from those for Feedback in the Trust module.

Team Quests and the Team Journal. Each selected practice has its own Team Quest, holding the transfer goals the team agreed during the facilitated session. The team leader creates the quest and its goals; the whole team and the facilitator can see it.

The quest is where accountability becomes visible. Members track their progress, share reflections and comment on one another's entries. Attached to each quest is the **Team Journal**, a shared thread where the team can add comments and images as the practice develops.

The Learning Journal. The Learning Journal is private to the participant. Reflections written in response to the microlearning

cards are saved here automatically, so a participant builds a personal record across the journey without having to maintain it deliberately. Nothing in the Learning Journal is visible to the facilitator or to colleagues.

The ChatBOT. The ChatBOT is an AI companion available from any page, designed to support reflection rather than supply answers. It is private to the participant.

The Library. The Library holds curated resources organised around the three competences, ranging from short clips to longer talks, practical articles, research and ELEVATE's own interactive tools. The same collection appears in the ELEVATE Toolbox at the end of this part, so facilitators and teams can prepare for a module or revisit a topic in their own time.

In a nutshell:

- The platform has nine elements, met in the order a participant encounters them.
- Every module follows the same four-part shape: pre-assessment, video overview, the four steps, post-assessment.
- The module assessments are individual and distinct from the SAT and from the Kick-Off reflection.
- Team Quests hold the team's transfer goals and make accountability visible; the Team Journal supports shared reflection.
- The Learning Journal and ChatBOT are private to the participant.

Key takeaways: The platform's architecture mirrors the ELEVATE methodology: the same four steps a team works through together are the four steps each member works through alone, which is what allows individual reflection to feed back into team development.

Chapter 13: The E-Learning Space — what to be aware of as a facilitator

What to expect from this chapter: This chapter covers what a facilitator needs to do and to watch for: setting the platform up, guiding a team through it, reading progress data responsibly, and the practical safeguards worth putting in place. It closes with a quick-start checklist.

13.1 Setting up as Company Admin

The facilitator or Company Admin configures the team's space before the modules open. This involves creating the team, adding members, and setting up the three practices the team selected at the Kick-Off so that participants find the right modules and quests when they first log in.

Participants can explore the Library and make entries in the Learning Journal from the Kick-Off onwards. They can begin the modules once this configuration is complete.

13.2 Guiding a team through the platform

The following practices help facilitators integrate the E-Learning Space into the facilitated journey, so that the platform supports rather than sits alongside the team's learning process:

- **Introduce it as part of the process, not as homework.** The

framing set out in Chapter 11 matters: this is an extension of the learning process, not of the workshop.

- **Agree how the platform will be used during the facilitated session,** while the team is together. Expectations agreed in the room hold better than instructions sent afterwards.
- **Log in with the team the first time.** Doing the first pre-assessment together removes most of the friction that otherwise prevents a start.
- **Monitor progress and follow up with the team leader.** This sustains momentum and reinforces accountability. It is part of facilitation rather than administration.
- **Bring platform experience back into the room.** Beginning the second and third sessions with reflection on the Team Quest connects the two environments and shows participants that what they do between sessions matters.

13.3 Reading progress data responsibly

The platform shows module completion and quest activity. This information supports facilitation; it is not a performance measure.

- Treat low activity as information about conditions rather than commitment. Workload, unclear expectations and technical difficulty are more common explanations than reluctance.
- Discuss patterns with the team leader before drawing conclusions.
- Respect the boundary between shared and private spaces. The Learning Journal and the ChatBOT are private, and saying so plainly is what makes honest reflection possible.
- Never use progress data in a way that could feel evaluative. Doing so once will reduce the quality of everything recorded afterwards.

13.4 Practical tips and safeguards

The following practical tips and safeguards help facilitators anticipate common issues and create the conditions for a smooth and focused team experience in the E-Learning Space.

- Check language settings at the outset; the platform is multilingual and participants should work in the language they think in.
- Confirm that team members can access the platform from their normal working environment before the Kick-Off ends.
- Keep transfer goals few and specific. A quest holding two clear goals will outperform one holding six.
- Agree who creates the quest and its goals; by default this is the team leader.
- Set the expectation that the Team Journal is for work in progress, not polished reporting.

In a nutshell:

- Configuration precedes the modules: the team's three selected practices need to be set up after the kick-off and before participants can begin the sessions / modules.
- Use of the platform should be agreed in the room, and the first login is best ensured before the first session.
- Monitoring progress is part of facilitation, and low activity usually reflects conditions rather than commitment.
- Private and shared spaces have different purposes: the Learning Journal is private, while the Team Journal and Team Quests support shared learning.
- Few, specific transfer goals work better than many.

Key takeaways: How a facilitator introduces and uses the platform determines whether it becomes part of the team's learning or an obligation alongside it. The difference is made in the first session, not in the weeks afterwards.

Best practice in implementing the Learning Path and E-Learning Space

What to expect from this chapter: This section gives the floor to the people who piloted the ELEVATE Learning Path: team members and team leaders who went through it, and facilitators who ran it. They are speaking about their own teams, a short time after the Learning Path ended, and their contributions are included with their consent.

The accounts that follow trace three aspects of the piloting experience: what teams came to recognise about how they work, what they carried into everyday practice, and what their feedback contributed to the further development of the Learning Path.

The pilot took place over an extended period, allowing for several cycles of implementation, feedback and refinement. The Learning Path was therefore evolving as teams experienced it: feedback from earlier pilots informed changes that shaped the experience of those who followed. The accounts that follow reflect these different stages of development. Some teams describe working with an earlier version and identifying what was still missing, while others experienced changes introduced along the way. Together, their reflections show both how the Learning Path was experienced and how it evolved through use.

What a team sees when it looks at itself: The piloting showed how turning attention to everyday ways of working can make previously unrecognised team patterns visible. Facilitators and participants described how this recognition opened up new conversations about how different team members experience the same ways of working.

The recognition often began with something the team had never deliberately decided:



Some of the teams already had their own dynamics, which were not intentionally designed, but were “emerging” as they collaborated. However, quite often, these responded to the “main voices” preferences, and they were not even aware of it. The pilots helped the team members being aware of their dynamics and, more importantly, how “our way” makes each of them feel, differently. I had the impression that, by naming and pointing out feelings, a special “atmosphere” was emerging, where everyone wanted to create a safe space for the others. This time, intentionally.

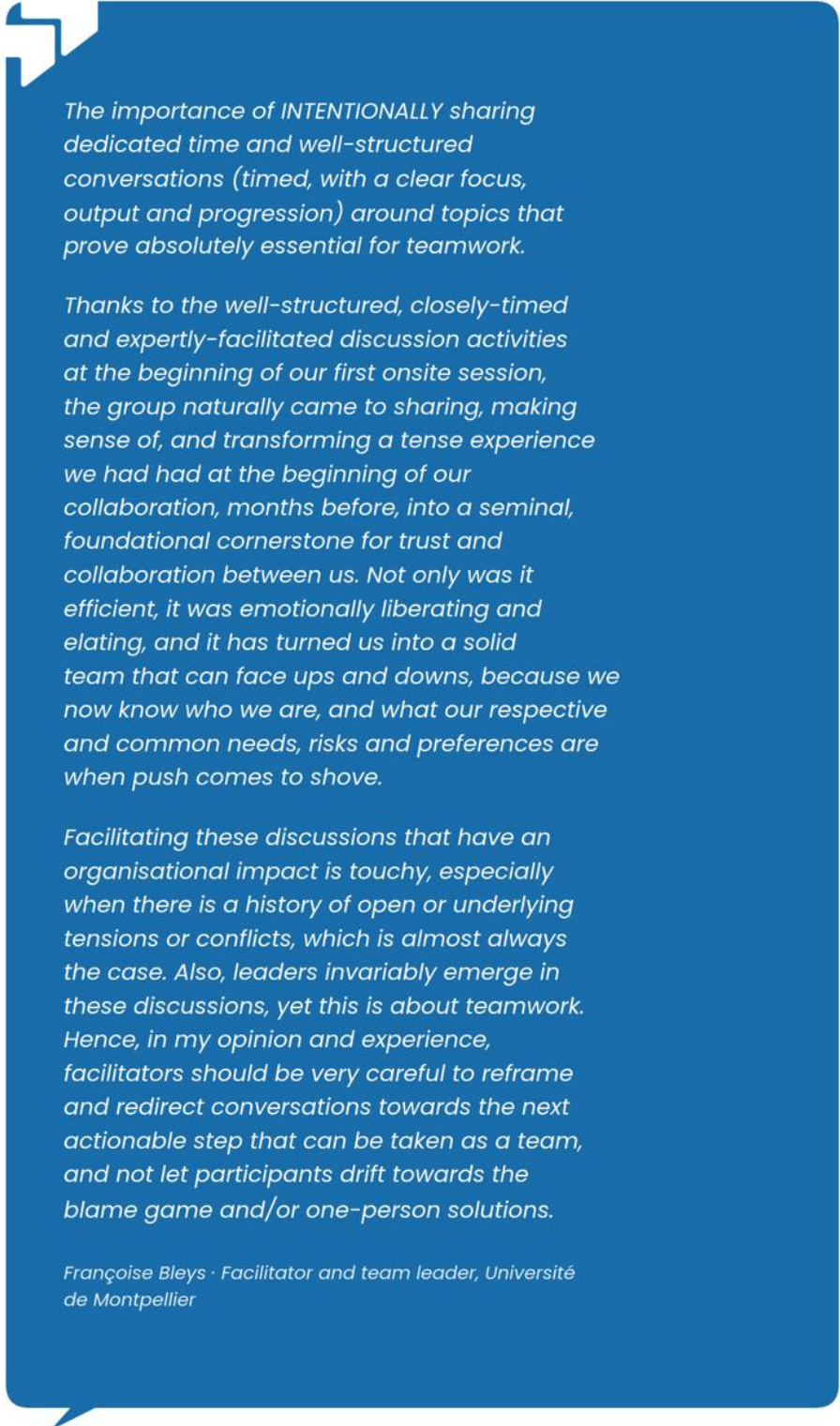
It was very important when some members were listening to others explain how they have sometimes felt, and they discovered negative feelings they were not aware of. But one could notice their willingness to change that, through our methodology. This idea of willingness to connect, belong and take care of others was “in the air”, and they saw the value and contribution of ELEVATE.

Naiara Arnaez · Facilitator, Mondragon Unibertsitatea



The shift from managing differences to surfacing commonalities was very helpful. It reduced tensions in the room and opened up space for more honest and profound discussions. This first step in identifying what the team already shares gives a more solid foundation for developing new practices or improving the existing ones.

Natalia Kowbasiuk · Facilitator, deReso



The importance of INTENTIONALLY sharing dedicated time and well-structured conversations (timed, with a clear focus, output and progression) around topics that prove absolutely essential for teamwork.

Thanks to the well-structured, closely-timed and expertly-facilitated discussion activities at the beginning of our first onsite session, the group naturally came to sharing, making sense of, and transforming a tense experience we had had at the beginning of our collaboration, months before, into a seminal, foundational cornerstone for trust and collaboration between us. Not only was it efficient, it was emotionally liberating and elating, and it has turned us into a solid team that can face ups and downs, because we now know who we are, and what our respective and common needs, risks and preferences are when push comes to shove.

Facilitating these discussions that have an organisational impact is touchy, especially when there is a history of open or underlying tensions or conflicts, which is almost always the case. Also, leaders invariably emerge in these discussions, yet this is about teamwork. Hence, in my opinion and experience, facilitators should be very careful to reframe and redirect conversations towards the next actionable step that can be taken as a team, and not let participants drift towards the blame game and/or one-person solutions.

Françoise Bleys · Facilitator and team leader, Université de Montpellier

What carries into everyday work: The value of the Learning Path also becomes visible in what teams continue to do after the facilitated sessions. Participants described changes in how they communicate, collaborate and give feedback, as well as specific practices they have continued to apply in their everyday work.

I have noticed that our team has become more open and comfortable in sharing different perspectives and giving feedback. The Learning Journey also helped me understand my teammates better, including their communication styles, personalities, and ways of working, which I did not fully understand before. This has been very helpful in my daily work, as I can better understand how to communicate and collaborate with each person. It has helped us work more smoothly, understand each other better, and find better ways to work together as a team. I also feel that we have become more connected as a team, which makes our collaboration more meaningful and enjoyable.

Kharolin Hilda Amazona · Team member, intercultures

The team has become more open to new things. Trust has increased. Tasks are shared out by everyone. Further development is now possible. Other cultures can be integrated.

„Das Team ist offener für Neues geworden. Das Vertrauen ist gestiegen. Aufgaben werden von allen verteilt. Weiterentwicklung ist nun möglich. Andere Kulturen können integriert werden.“

Inka Eichhorn · Leitung Integrationshilfe, AWO Soziale Dienste gGmbH Worms, Pilot team member

What the piloting changed, and what it left open: The evolving relationship between the facilitated sessions and the E-Learning Space provides one of the clearest examples of how feedback shaped the Learning Path. Facilitators valued the two environments as complementary, while identifying the connection between them as an area for further development.



Number 1 development for the future: articulating the web app and onsite sessions. The web app should include a clear learning journey, and measurable objectives/outcomes, and mostly be used IN CONTINUITY AND ARTICULATION with the onsite sessions to build a rich, integrated learning experience. Also, that would be a way of creating action learning that develops from tackling real problems through action (the activities already designed for onsite sessions) but also through integrated reflection thanks to built-in back-and-forth between pointed content in the web app and an activity prompt. That would help reaching a practical balance: enough input to act intelligently, then learn and integrate rapidly from doing.

Françoise Bleys · Facilitator and team leader, Université de Montpellier



The e-learning space adds a sense of continuity. It has been with us from the very first moment of learning through to our last session, present during the facilitated sessions and in between them. The way the sessions and the e-learning space were articulated together meant it felt like a place where everything we learned, did and discussed could keep living beyond the sessions themselves, and that gave the team a sense of safety and continuity it could rely on.

Sameh Toumine · Team leader, intercultures

More voices from the piloting: The contributions below were given on condition of anonymity. They are recorded here in the contributors' own words, identified only by their role in the Learning Path.

The joint reflections when the participants could understand different points of view but then they commit to a Transfer goal.

A facilitator · contributed anonymously

Since the ELEVATE Learning Journey, I've noticed a few changes in how I work with my team. We started using tools that make communication a lot more fluid, so we're not relying on meetings just to know where things stand. Overall there's more transparency on the team, and decisions move faster because nobody's stuck waiting on information.

A team member · contributed anonymously

The way we deal with each other in the team has become more open. There is greater transparency about the work everyone is doing.

„Der Umgang im Team ist offener geworden. Größere Transparenz der Arbeit aller Beteiligten.“

A team member · contributed anonymously

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Part IV

Sustain and move beyond: big pictures, reflections, and outlooks

The three parts behind you were about doing the work: understanding why a shift in perspective is needed, finding out where an organisation stands, and taking a team through a learning journey. This part is different in kind. Part 4 is where the ELEVATE project turns its attention on itself. It asks what we have learned from doing this — including where the approach worked less well than we hoped, what the piloting phase could not yet show, and which questions we are leaving open rather than answering. The register changes accordingly. These chapters are more exploratory than the ones before them. They contain fewer instructions and more thinking-out-loud, because that is the honest form for material of this kind. **A handbook that ended by restating its own method would have nothing to say about its limits.**

Three chapters follow, and they invite you to reflect and think beyond. [Chapter 14](#) stays closest to the practice. It looks at how the facilitated and digital parts of the journey hold together — or fail to — and what the pilot teams revealed about why. [Chapter 15](#) steps back to ask what the project actually found across all the teams that took part, and is candid about how much the evidence can carry. [Chapter 16](#) steps back further again, to ask what the ELEVATE experience might mean beyond the project: what it suggests about how organisations learn, and how it sits within a wider shift in the social sciences towards seeing relationships as primary rather than secondary. Read together, the three chapters trace a single movement: **reflection on the practice, learning from the project, and looking beyond it.** The part closes with voices from the project team, and with the questions we are handing on.

Chapter 14: Blended learning – from parallel paths to a learning ecosystem

What to expect from this chapter: What to expect from this chapter: Every ELEVATE team learns through two connected environments but follows one learning journey. It begins in the facilitated sessions, where the team meets and works together, and continues in the E-Learning Space between sessions.

A team does not learn through people alone. It learns through the languages, spaces, tools and technologies that shape how its members collaborate, reflect and put learning into practice.

This chapter explores that idea through three questions:

- How can the learning journey function as one ecosystem rather than two parallel channels?
- What role does the E-Learning Space play when considered through the ways teams actually use it?
- How can teams use tools and technologies to sustain the agreements and practices they develop together?

The practical guide to the platform – its features, module structure, group set-up and facilitation – is in [Part 3](#), Chapters 11 to 13. This chapter builds on that guidance to examine the role of the E-Learning Space within the wider journey.

14.1 Why the connection between environments matters

Teams collaborate across languages, physical and digital spaces, meeting platforms, shared documents, digital systems and, increasingly, AI-supported technologies. If transcultural competence develops through relationships, as the ELEVATE approach holds, these environments and tools are not simply a backdrop to collaboration. They shape what teams notice, what they record,

how they communicate and, over time, how they work together. The digital part of the journey is therefore not an add-on to the facilitated work.

The connection becomes particularly important between sessions. The journey unfolds over several months, with modules separated by periods of independent work. This spacing is intentional: practices need time and repetition to become habits. But much of what happens

between sessions lies outside the direct control of the learning design.

Change takes several forms, and each one loosens the design's grip. Members progress at different speeds, so by the second module a team can contain people who have worked closely with the material and people who have barely opened it. A reorganisation or a period of sustained pressure can change what a chosen practice involves — or make a practice the team did not select the more urgent one. When time is short, disagreements tend to be avoided rather than worked through, so a practice that scored well at the Kick-Off can become the one that most needs attention by the fifth week. Transfer goals themselves deform on contact with daily work, as rituals are modified, absorbed into existing routines or quietly abandoned. Team composition shifts, context shifts, goals deform, and the team's boundary is never closed.

What changes across a learning journey is therefore not only a team's competence but the urgency attached to each practice. The ranking that shaped the original selection can be overtaken by events.

A well-connected journey maintains continuity across these spaces and periods. It allows participants to revisit what they have explored, apply it in practice, and bring their experience back into the next session.

The piloting phase confirmed how much this matters. Participants experienced the digital and facilitated components as complementary while also identifying stronger articulation between them as an area for development. Practical measures — clearer communication, reminders, closer alignment between sessions and modules — support that connection. The finding also raises a broader question: what role should the E-Learning Space play within the wider journey?

14.2 How the journey holds together

Blended learning can easily be understood as two parallel tracks — a facilitated track and a digital track running alongside it, with occasional points of connection. The piloting experience exposed the limitation of this model. If the two tracks function independently, responsibility for connecting them falls to the facilitator or to individual participants. Facilitation and participant engagement are

essential, but the learning design itself should also carry some of that weight.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND • DISTRIBUTED COGNITION

The cognitive scientist Edwin Hutchins offers one way of understanding how thinking can extend beyond the individual. In his study of airline crews, he showed how cognition can be distributed across people, instruments, displays and shared routines (Hutchins, 1995). Learning can be understood in a similar way. A team's development does not take place only within individual minds. It also develops through the shared structures, tools and practices that support learning between encounters.

In ELEVATE, these structures are already part of the journey. What a team explores and agrees during a facilitated session is carried into the E-Learning Space and revisited in the weeks that follow. The platform is therefore more than a place to access content. It becomes part of the team's shared memory.

Seen this way, the journey is a continuous cycle running across the three selected practices. In the facilitated session, the team works through the four stages of the

methodology. The corresponding module then works through the same four stages in a different form, making the underlying concepts explicit. Transfer goals agreed during the session are tracked through Team Quests, while individual and collective reflections accumulate. The journey then returns to the facilitated space, where what participants have explored between sessions informs the next conversation and the next practice.

For the four stages and the developmental logic behind them, see Part 3, [Chapter 8](#).

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND • SOCIOMATERIALITY, AND WHY THIS IS AN ECOSYSTEM

The connection between these stages can be understood as connective tissue. Sociomaterial research highlights how technologies and practices are closely intertwined, and how the meaning and use of a platform depend on the practices developed around it (Orlikowski, 2007).

The transcultural research conducted within the ELEVATE framework offers another useful distinction. Josef Wieland's distinction between relations

and connections, introduced in [Chapter 1](#), applies directly here. Two learning tracks that occasionally meet are connected. A learning journey becomes relational when the different parts continually influence one another.

This is also why it is useful to speak of an ecosystem rather than a system. An ecosystem depends on the relationships between its elements and requires those relationships to be maintained. Milton Bennett, working in the same tradition, draws on Maturana's concept of structural coupling to describe how systems generate meaning through interaction rather than instruction (Baumann Montecinos et al., 2025). Meaning is not transmitted from one part of a system to another; it arises as the parts adjust to one another over time. Which is why the relation between the session and the E-Learning Space has to be maintained rather than set up once.

An ecosystem does not maintain itself. The pilot teams whose modules remained unopened illustrate this clearly.

The piloting feedback identified integration as a priority for development. Facilitators

described the main challenge not as a lack of value in the E-Learning Space, but as the difficulty of connecting what happens in the sessions with what participants are expected to do between them. One facilitator described this as the most difficult part of the learning path, noting that leaving the E-Learning Space to individual reflection made follow-up hard for some participants. Another suggested opening the platform during the sessions and using participants' responses as part of the facilitated work, so that work in the E-Learning Space becomes a continuation of the session rather than something separate. A third recommendation was to map a clearer learner path across the onsite and online resources, making the overall journey and the relationship between its elements more visible.

These observations informed subsequent adjustments to the learning path, and the results are reflected in the piloting data presented below.

Integration is not only a feature of the platform or the learning design. It is created through the ways the team and facilitator move between the two environments.

The two environments also engage with the methodology

differently. In the facilitated session, the methodology is experienced through action and dialogue before it is explained. Participants work with their own experiences, share and cluster their needs, recognise patterns, design rituals and turn these into transfer goals. The module then makes the concepts behind the practice explicit.

This sequence is intentional.

Practice precedes theory: what the team experiences in the session is later named and explored through the module. The two environments do not reproduce the same content. They support different but connected dimensions of the same process — one primarily experiential, the other making the underlying concepts explicit.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND • THE PEDAGOGICAL RHYTHM BEHIND THE SEQUENCE

This reflects a well-established rhythm of experience, reflection, conceptualisation and experimentation (Kolb & Kolb, 2017). It also connects with Freire's concept of praxis, in which action and reflection continuously inform one another (Freire, 2000).

The piloting experience makes this relationship pointed. Some pilot teams experienced the modules

as an additional demand rather than a continuation of the sessions — in other words, the digital component could feel like a second learning journey beginning after the first one had finished.

One response is to make the correspondence between the two environments explicit. A module can refer back to the activity through which participants experienced a particular step.

A facilitator can close a session by naming what participants will encounter again in the E-Learning Space. When the lived experience and the conceptual content clearly refer to one another, the platform becomes a continuation of the learning rather than an additional task.

What the pilot data shows: Eight teams across five countries used the same platform. As of 29 August 2026, teams were at very different stages of the learning path, ranging from barely started to more than three quarters completed.

This variation cannot be explained by the platform, since every team had access to the same environment. Nor by how far each team had travelled: the one most engaged team had completed fewer sessions than most of the teams with almost no

activity. Nor by team size — one team of three had every member active, while a team of thirteen had none.

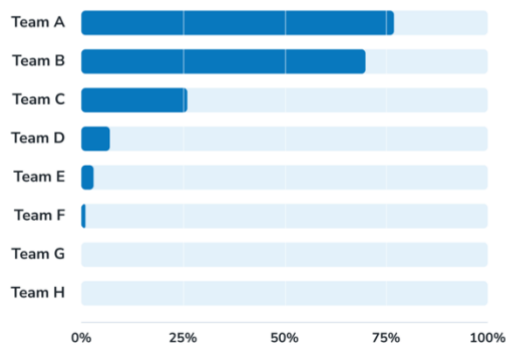
What differed was how the E-Learning Space was introduced and used around the sessions. The three engaged teams brought it into the facilitated experience itself. In these teams the pre-

assessment questions were completed as part of the session, and in one case the platform video guide was shown during the session rather than left for participants to find on their own. The remaining five teams had the same platform available and had barely opened it.

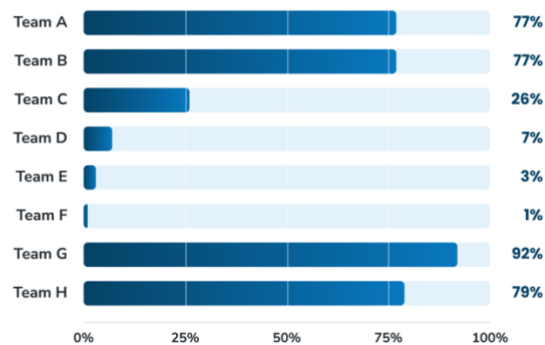
Progress through the E-Learning Space, by team

Eight pilot teams, five countries, 77 participants, identical platform. Pilots ongoing.

29 August 2026



12 September 2026



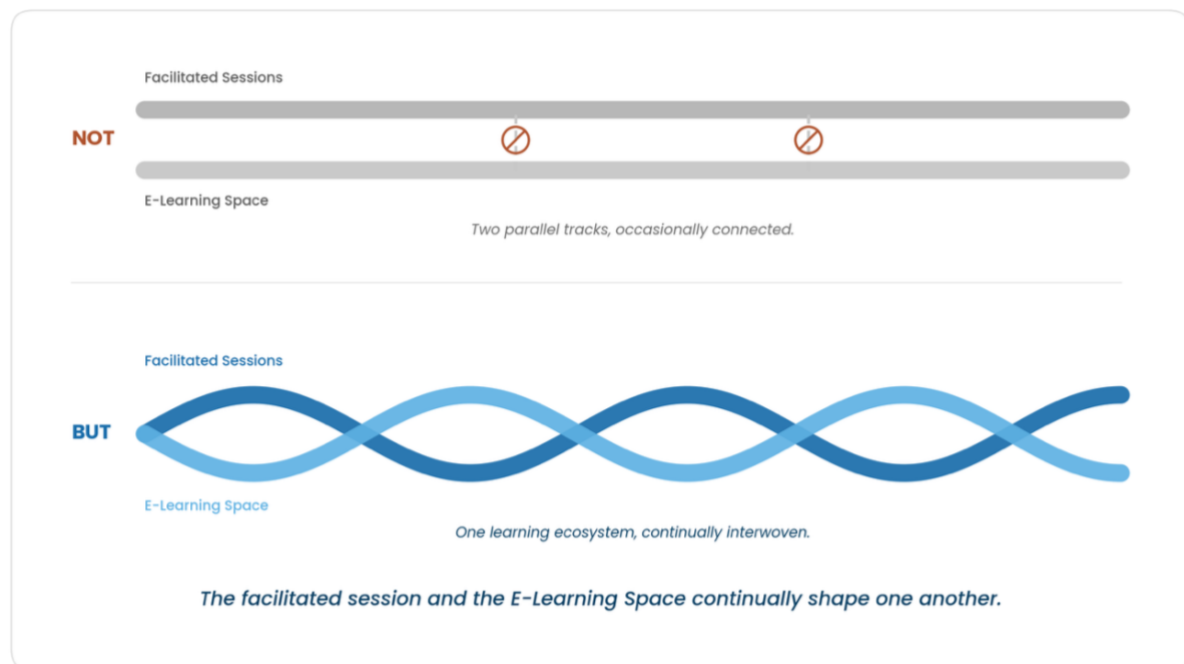
Progress through the E-Learning Space across the eight pilot teams, 29 August and 12 September 2026. Teams anonymised

This points to something important: **the connective tissue between the two environments is not only digital.** It includes the facilitator's introduction, the way the E-Learning Space is referred to during the session, the team's agreement about how it will use the space, and the moments when activities and learning content are explicitly connected. The platform already provides the elements needed to support this

connection. The piloting experience suggests those elements get used when the sessions and the E-Learning Space are presented and experienced as parts of one journey — and stay unused when the two run alongside one another without meeting. A subsequent measurement, taken on 12 September 2026, recorded two previously inactive teams now at 92% and 79% completion following

renewed facilitator input. Although this use of the platform did not take place as synchronously with the facilitated sessions as the learning journey intends, it indicates the weight facilitator input carries in activating use of the E-Learning Space.

Developmental changes to the platform over this period were not the deciding factor. What determined the difference was the facilitators' articulation of the space within the team's work and their persistence in returning to it.



ELEVATE Learning Path and E-Learning Space as one ecosystem

Pause and reflect: *A team finishes a session having agreed three rituals. Two weeks later, nobody can quite recall the wording of the second one, and the flip chart has been thrown away. What would you observe here? Is this simply a memory problem, or does it also raise a question about where the team's thinking is held between sessions?*

14.3 An enacted space, inhabited asynchronously

Team members are rarely in the E-Learning Space at the same time. Each participant moves through a module independently, at a time that suits them. The collective dimension of the journey is therefore asynchronous, even though participants are reflecting on their team and its ways of working.

The assessments invite participants to consider both their individual experience and their team's practices. The transfer goals they track were designed collectively, and the Team Journal keeps reflections and progress available to other team members.

The individual and collective dimensions are connected through both content and practice. Participants reflect individually on the team, and some of their contributions become part of the team's shared learning. A completed transfer goal is visible to the team; comments in the Team Journal remain available for others to revisit. This creates a layer of collective learning without requiring everyone to be present at the same time.

The E-Learning Space becomes a shared space through the practices that keep it active: exploring the same content, following shared goals and leaving traces that others encounter later.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND • ENACTED SPACE AND STIGMERGY

Educational researchers Andrew Deuchar and colleagues describe learning spaces as environments

enacted through practice rather than existing as containers for activity. A space becomes meaningful through the relationships and activities that take place within it, and weakens when those practices disappear (Deuchar et al., 2025). This applies to asynchronous digital spaces as well as physical ones.

A similar idea appears in the transcultural management literature through the concept of relational spaces. Drawing on Amin's account of relational space, Grünfelder and Baumann Montecinos (2025) describe such spaces as emerging through multiple relational events, stabilised only provisionally and changing as they are continually remade. Relational spaces therefore need to be established and maintained rather than assumed. The facilitator's role is not to introduce the platform once, but to help the team establish ways of using it that keep it connected to their shared work.

A second useful concept is stigmergy. Originally used to describe how insects coordinate through traces left in a shared environment, it has been extended to human coordination through shared

digital environments (Heylighen, 2016). Rather than requiring direct communication between everyone involved, coordination emerges when people encounter and respond to traces left by others.

This describes the Team Quest particularly well. A completed transfer goal is a trace. A comment in the Team Journal is a trace. When another team member later enters the E-Learning Space, they encounter these traces and respond through their own progress, reflections or renewed awareness of where the team stands.

The Team Quest therefore functions as more than a tracker. It provides an environment in which the team maintains continuity across time. Members do not need to be online simultaneously for shared learning to continue. What connects them is the accumulation of shared traces.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND • WHY A TRACKER IS NEVER A NEUTRAL RECORD

Digital systems do not simply record activity. Research on digital data shows that the patterns and information platforms present can influence what people notice, prioritise

and do next (Lupton & Watson, 2021).

Progress indicators, self-assessment results and other forms of digital feedback therefore become part of the learning process itself. The question is not only what the platform records or displays, but how those representations influence subsequent conversations, interpretations and decisions. A progress bar showing a team as three-quarters complete invites a different conversation from one showing it as barely started — whatever either team has actually learned.

14.4 From agreement to habit: a team's own tool

The final stage of the methodology asks for a transition the earlier stages do not. RECOGNISE, CONNECT and ELEVATE focus on becoming aware of patterns, articulating needs and designing new ways of working. IMPLEMENT focuses on embedding those ways of working into everyday practice. *See Part 3, [Chapter 8](#), for the four stages.*

A ritual that has to be consciously remembered every time it is performed has not yet become a sustainable practice. Under pressure, teams return to familiar

ways of working. IMPLEMENT therefore focuses on creating conditions in which the agreed way of working becomes easier to repeat.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND · RITUALS AS A WAY OF STORING SHARED MEANING

Schein (2010) describes rituals as ways in which organisations embed and transmit culture, allowing shared meaning and action to continue beyond the moment they were first agreed. A transfer goal therefore becomes more sustainable when it has a concrete container. The tool or environment in which a practice is embedded helps the team remember, repeat and eventually internalise the new way of working.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND · WHEN A PRACTICE MOVES INTO A TOOL

N. Katherine Hayles offers a useful perspective on this transition. In *Unthought* (2017) she argues that cognition also takes place through processes operating below conscious awareness, and that technical systems participate in cognitive processes. When people and technical systems work together they form what she calls cognitive assemblages: arrangements in which

information flows between human and technical participants and is interpreted by both, so that the thinking is carried by the arrangement rather than by any single part of it.

Applied to ELEVATE, this suggests that embedding a practice is not only a question of individual motivation or conscious effort. A way of working also becomes part of the tools and processes through which a team operates. Embedding a practice means moving a way of working out of conscious deliberation and into the processes that operate without being noticed.

A case from the piloting phase

A team from one of the ELEVATE partner organisations selected feedback as one of its practices. During the session it developed rituals around giving clear feedback and including an actionable step. During IMPLEMENT, this became a four-part checklist within a transfer goal.

The team first considered a shared spreadsheet, but this did not meet one of the needs identified during CONNECT: anonymity. It therefore developed a small web application through

which feedback could be given anonymously against the agreed criteria. The receiver could indicate which criteria the feedback met, and the results accumulated into a visible measure of feedback quality over time. A fifth criterion, concerning the giver's understanding of the task and its constraints, was added while the tool was being designed. **The process of building the tool influenced the practice itself.**

The tool also changed how the practice was performed. The criteria were not a checklist to consult before giving feedback; they became part of the structure through which feedback was given. Repetition happened within the tool rather than depending on participants remembering to apply the criteria.

Team members later reported that the criteria had begun to influence how they thought about feedback outside the tool as well. The practice had started to move from the digital environment into everyday behaviour. The tool was not simply storing the practice. It was helping the team practise it until it became familiar.

The same principle applies without a purpose-built tool. Transfer goals can use containers that already form part of a team's

everyday work: a knowledge-sharing channel, a weekly meeting, a form, a regular handover conversation.

One of this team's goals for its second practice was simply: *"Thanked one teammate on Slack for something I learned from them."* The platform is easy to overlook because it is already part of everyday work. Yet the choice of tool still shapes the practice. A message posted in a shared channel is visible to others and remains available over time, so the tool influences who sees the appreciation and how long it stays visible. The E-Learning Space holds the goal and its tracking, while the practice itself takes place in the team's existing working environment. **This is one reason ELEVATE has teams design their own rituals rather than receive predefined ones.**

The process continued after the team's third session, on conflict resolution and constructive disagreement. Those transfer goals focused strongly on clarity, and the team developed a task tracker to support the practice. Its purpose and structure differed from the feedback tool, but both emerged from the same recognition: **a practice needs somewhere to live.**

Read as a sequence, the process is instructive. The Team Quest turned transfer goals into something that needed tracking. That led the team to identify a suitable environment for the practice. The team then designed a feedback instrument, which later influenced how it approached another practice and led to a second tool.

This illustrates how a learning journey produces more than the practices it initially set out to develop. It also builds a team's capacity to design and sustain new practices in response to future needs. Grünfelder and Baumann Montecinos (2025) describe this widening through the concept of a **cooperation corridor** – the space of what a group is able to do together, which expands as commonalities and shared practices are developed and maintained. *For commonalities and how they develop, see Part 1, [Chapter 2](#).*

The case should not be treated as an evaluation of the approach. It is one team's experience over a limited period. What it illustrates is the IMPLEMENT stage from the inside: a shared agreement acquiring a concrete form, that form being shaped by the tool created to support it, and the resulting practice gradually

becoming easier to sustain. The team designed the instrument that trained the team.

Pause and reflect: *A team builds a form for giving feedback. Six weeks later the form is barely used, but people report giving better feedback than before. Has the tool failed – or has the practice begun to move from the instrument into everyday behaviour?*

14.5 Strengthening the connection: directions for further development

The main elements needed to connect the E-Learning Space with the facilitated sessions are already in place, and the facilitation practices that support them are set out in Part 3, [Chapter 13](#). What follows is therefore not a list of missing features. These are possibilities for strengthening the relationship between the elements that already exist.

The starting point is the relationship between what happens during a session and what participants encounter in the module. Each of the first three stages within a module opens with a scenario, and each microlearning card includes a reflection box whose response is stored in the participant's Learning

Journal. The scenario presents a situation participants have not necessarily experienced, while the activity they have just completed in the session is not part of the module. The existing platform provides a way to connect these two experiences without creating anything new.

Much of a team's thinking is already recorded during a session — on sticky notes, boards, session slides. These visible records form part of how the team identifies and discusses its patterns, and they do not need to be recreated digitally.

Because reflections in the E-Learning Space can include images, a photograph or screenshot allows this material to continue into the weeks between sessions. A photograph of a clustered board can go into the Team Journal; personal notes can go into the Learning Journal. The physical board or the slides remain the primary working space during the session, and the image gives the team's thinking somewhere to remain afterwards.

If this happens during the session rather than only afterwards, the digital component no longer appears to begin once the facilitated learning has finished.

The two concepts introduced earlier both illuminate why. From the perspective of distributed cognition, this extends where the team's thinking is held: what is developed during a session exists in the room, in participants' memories and in whatever the team chooses to record.

Capturing selected elements distributes that thinking across people, journals, images and the platform, making it easier for the team to return to its own learning rather than reconstruct it later. Stigmergy offers a parallel point: coordination through traces depends on the availability and continuity of those traces. The Team Quest already creates one trail. If each stage of a module also left a trace, the E-Learning Space would hold a richer record of the journey — the pattern the team chose to address, the needs it identified, the rituals it considered, and the boards through which those ideas first emerged.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND • THE BINARIES THIS CHAPTER WORKS WITH

Donna Haraway's work describes the figures through which we understand the world as simultaneously material and semiotic, highlighting how physical materials and the meanings carried through them cannot always be

separated into distinct categories (Haraway, 1991). A practice and the materials through which it is carried are not two separate things that happen to travel together.

Applied to ELEVATE, a thought written on a sticky note, photographed, stored in a journal and revisited several weeks later is not simply duplicated across locations. It continues to participate in the team's meaning-making as it moves through different materials and contexts.

The learning path and the learning journey, the individual and the collective, are better understood as dimensions of one complex system than as parallel paths requiring connection.

The distinction matters. Parallel paths are separate routes that run alongside one another and need connecting. Dimensions are different aspects of the same thing, and cannot be pulled apart without destroying what they

describe. **A room's height and width are not two rooms.**

The same applies to the two learning environments. What happens in the facilitated session and what happens in the E-Learning Space are not a live version and a digital version of the learning. They are different expressions of the same learning process. The session provides opportunities to experience and develop practices together; the E-Learning Space provides opportunities to revisit, reflect on, conceptualise and continue working with them. The question therefore shifts from how to connect two separate components to how to help one learning journey remain visible and coherent as it moves between different environments and forms. This is a question of practice as much as of design — which is why most of it can be addressed through existing features and facilitation rather than a different platform.

In a nutshell:

- The digital dimension of the journey is not an accessory to the facilitated learning. It is one of the environments through which a team's learning is sustained and transferred into practice.
- The journey works as one ecosystem rather than two parallel tracks, and an ecosystem has to be maintained rather than set up once.
- Connective practices carry participants between the environments: naming the module during the session, capturing session material in the Team Journal, connecting transfer goals to the platform before the session ends.
- The E-Learning Space becomes a shared environment even when used asynchronously. What connects a team is not simultaneous presence but the traces members leave.
- Eight pilot teams with identical access ranged from no engagement to more than three quarters of the content. The difference lay in how the platform was introduced and used around the sessions — not in the platform, the team's progress or its size.
- A practice needs somewhere to live. One team's journey from a shared agreement to a self-built tool shows the IMPLEMENT stage from the inside.
- A learning journey leaves behind more than the practices it set out to develop. It strengthens a team's capacity to design and sustain new ones.

Key takeaway: Teams and technologies already shape one another in blended learning. The opportunity within ELEVATE is to make that relationship deliberate, so that the environments, tools and practices surrounding a team support the journey rather than becoming separate channels alongside it.

Where this leads: This chapter has looked closely at one team at a time: how its learning is held across two environments over the months of a journey, and what makes the connection between them hold or fail. How much can those findings carry?

Chapter 15: Scalable learnings and outlooks

What to expect in this Chapter: Chapter 14 examined the learning journey from the inside, one team at a time. This chapter widens the view to the project as a whole — and to what the Self-Assessment Tool and the ELEVATE Learning Path have actually produced.

The results are clear and they point the same way. Across 36 organisations that used the SAT and eight teams that travelled the Learning Path, in five countries and several sectors, the same outcomes recur: teams develop a shared language for talking about difference, they shift from describing themselves in official terms to examining how they actually work, and they build concrete practices that did not exist before. Several of those practices are still in use months later, and some have spread beyond the team that invented them.

The impact evaluation shows measurable movement in every area it assesses. One team's changes in everyday practice were visible enough to be documented item by item, and are set out in 15.7.

The chapter takes the three components in turn. **First the Self-Assessment Tool**, and what over 35 representatives from organisations made of it. **Then the Learning Path**, where most of the evidence sits, including a case followed in depth. **Then the E-Learning Space**, and what the platform data reveals about how teams engage with it. The chapter closes with an outlook on what scales and what comes next.

A note on the evidence

This chapter draws on SAT piloting feedback from 35 representatives of organisations, impact-evaluation data from the four teams that have completed it, platform data from eight teams, and one case documented in detail. The final impact evaluation is still in progress and will extend this dataset as the remaining

teams finish. What is reported here is what the completed evidence shows.

THE SELF-ASSESSMENT-TOOL

15.1 What the SAT produced

The SAT was piloted in two phases with 36 organisations across countries and sectors, **and the results were strong on the measures that matter for a reflection instrument.**

89%	83%	61%	67%
found the instructions very or mostly clear	rated the content somewhat or highly relevant	said it significantly supported reflection	considered the time required appropriate

More telling than the scores was what organisations did with the tool. Participants consistently reported that the SAT **surfaced differences of perception that had not previously been discussed** — between functions, between hierarchy levels, and between what an organisation says about itself and what people experience day to day.

“The self-assessment session really opened my eyes. You asked a lot of questions that I had never thought about before.” — Head of Department

That is the tool working as intended. It is a mirror for dialogue rather than a test, and the conversation it opens is the product. In the pilots the sequence that produced the most value was consistent: individual responses first, then a collective debrief, then action planning.

In practice, for facilitators: In practice, for facilitators:

treat the assessment as the shorter half of the work. Where organisations reported the most value, a facilitated debrief followed within days, and two or three priorities left the room with owners attached. *For the SAT itself and the debrief structure, see Part 2, Chapters 4 to 6.*

15.2 What the piloting changed

Four design lessons emerged from the two piloting phases, and all four were implemented in the final version.

- **Language had to become plainer.** Early wording that read clearly to the design team did not always read clearly to a cross-functional group.
- **Reflection questions needed strengthening.** The maturity descriptions establish where an organisation stands; the open questions move a group from a rating to a decision.
- **Modular use had to be supported.** Few organisations wanted all 26 subcategories at once. Working one dimension

at a time proved far more realistic.

- **Facilitated discussion had to be foregrounded.** The tool completed individually and left there produces a profile. The tool completed individually and then discussed produces priorities.

Taken together these point in one direction, and it is the most transferable lesson from this part of the piloting: **the SAT scales as a conversation, not as a questionnaire.**

THE LEARNING PATH

15.3 A shared language for discussing difference

The most consistent outcome across pilot teams is the emergence of a shared language for talking about differences. Participants report a markedly increased ability to articulate and engage with cultural, professional and interpersonal diversity.

This matters more than it may first appear. A team that cannot name what is happening between its members has no way of changing it. **What teams gained was not agreement about their differences, but the capacity to discuss them without the conversation becoming a risk.**

The outcome is closely linked to the psychological safety built into the learning environment (Stühlinger, 2020). The structure of the Learning Path — guided reflection combined with collective dialogue — enabled participants to address sensitive or previously unspoken dynamics constructively.

“Trust has grown noticeably. I no longer feel I have to put on an exaggerated professional front. I can raise things quite openly and without fuss when there is something I don’t know.” — Team member

It is worth noting what kind of shared language this is. It is not a vocabulary for smoothing difference away. [Part 1](#) draws on Jullien’s distinction between the common and the similar: the common is productive precisely because it is *not* sameness. The language these teams developed was a language for working across difference while it remained.

In practice, for facilitators:

cultivate the conditions for relational coordination deliberately; redirect attention from divergence and difference-as-threat towards commonalities-as-resources; and allow a common layer of understanding to emerge rather than supplying one. *For psychological safety as a readiness condition, see Part 1, Chapter 3.2.*

15.4 From declared culture to lived reality

Closely related is a shift in how participants engage with organisational culture. Rather than reproducing formalised or declared narratives, teams increasingly explored their lived organisational realities — implicit norms, everyday practices, and tensions usually absent from official discourse.

This is a marker of increased organisational reflexivity, and a necessary condition for deeper transformation (McClellan, 2020).

It is also, almost exactly, the Change of Perspective that Part 1 asks of teams: the move from “*we are diverse*” to observing how we actually work together. That this shift appeared in the piloting evidence unprompted is among

the more significant results the project produced. **It suggests the shift is available to ordinary teams under ordinary conditions**, not only to teams unusually disposed towards reflection. See *Part 1, Chapter 3.2.*

In practice, for facilitators:

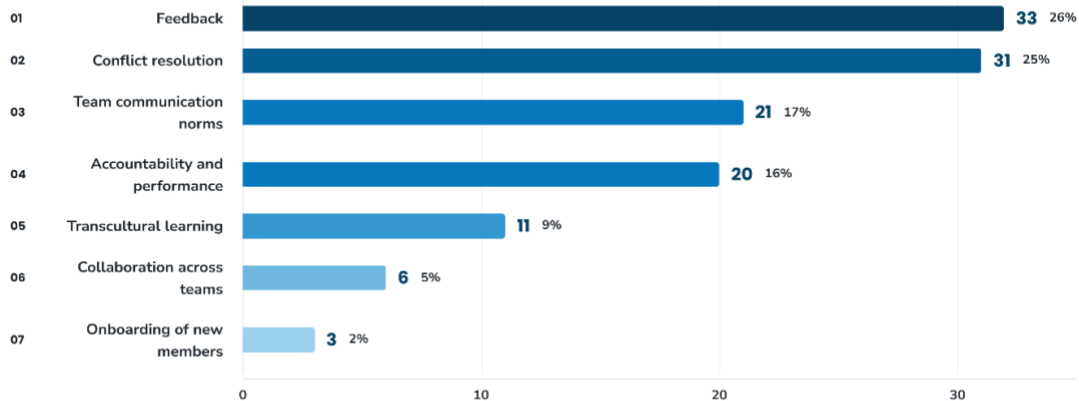
recognise the extent of this shift when it happens, name it, and sustain it long enough for the deeper transformation to follow. Teams do not always notice that they have started talking differently.

15.5 What teams chose to work on

At the Kick-Off each team selects three of the seven practices to develop. Across the eight pilot teams, the choices were strikingly consistent.

Practices participants worked on

45 participants; each reporting the three practices their team worked on.



Counts are participants, so larger teams have more weight. Eight pilot teams in total.

Practices participants worked on. 45 participants, each reporting the three practices their team selected. Counts are participants, so larger teams carry more weight.

Feedback and conflict resolution account for just over half of all selections — 33 and 31 mentions respectively — followed by team communication norms and accountability. Onboarding, collaboration across sites and everyday transcultural learning were chosen far less often. This tells us something useful about where multicultural teams experience friction. The practices teams reach for are the ones that govern **how difficult things get said**: how feedback is given, how disagreement is handled, what the norms of conversation are, and who is answerable for what. These are precisely the areas where unspoken assumptions do the most damage and where a difference in expectation is least

likely to be noticed before it causes a problem.

In practice, for facilitators: do not steer the choice, but be ready for it. The frequency of these two practices across countries and sectors points to a shared need rather than a local one, and facilitators should expect to work in that territory.

15.6 New commonalities, and the practices teams built

The Learning Path is designed to help teams develop new commonalities — shared meanings and shared practices that did not exist before. The piloting shows this happening, and happening deliberately.

One team chose feedback as its practice, agreed criteria for what

good feedback looks like during the session, and then built a small tool through which feedback could be given anonymously against those criteria. The tool was refined by the team as it was used, and a fifth criterion was added during the design process.

Chapter 14 follows this case in detail.

Neither the criteria nor the tool existed before the team created them, and neither belonged to any member's original way of working. Both were designed in response to a difficulty this particular team was having — which is what the methodology means by a commonality being developed rather than found. See *Part 1, Chapter 2*.

Participants do not always use the word *commonality* for what they build. The concept is often implicit rather than named — a matter of vocabulary rather than of practice.

In practice, for facilitators:

name a commonality when a team builds one. Making the link explicit between a new routine and the concept behind it is part of the work, and it is what allows a team to repeat the move on its own (Gonzalez et al., 2026).

15.7 Real, visible and measurable change: a case in depth

The clearest documentation the project has of practices taking hold comes from a team of nine staff who support individual children in schools and kindergartens. A department head, a team leader and seven team members took part, most of them working as independent contractors and spread across different sites.

How the journey ran

The facilitator led the SAT with the team as a pre-assessment, and the team then selected three of the seven practices together. The journey followed the standard structure — a Kick-Off, three four-hour sessions in weeks 1, 5 and 8, with 90-minute coaching between them, and an impact evaluation at the end. The team reassessed itself in workshops 2 and 3.

The team's central difficulty was distinctive: how to share responsibility and accountability not only within the team but alongside external stakeholders — parents, teachers, educators, welfare institutions. Much of what made their work hard happened at the boundary between organisations.

What the team built

Their answer was a set of hats. Each hat names a role and makes visible which role someone is

speaking from at a given moment. Six were created in the end, for different uses and audiences: a communication hat, a hat for the staff themselves, a parents' hat, a green responsibility hat, and one

for children using traffic-light colours.

The hats began as a way of clarifying roles inside the team. They became something considerably more useful.

Real, visible and measurable changes in team practice

Area	What changed
Onboarding	The responsibility hat, in plain language and with visual elements, is now used to give new staff a clear picture of what their role involves.
Sharing responsibility	The biggest change of all, in everyday practices, patterns and rituals. The hats work as an anchor and a prompt: they make it possible to raise the question of who is responsible for what with teachers, educators, parents and the employing organisation, and they give the conversation a structure. They are also used directly with the children, through the traffic-light hat.
Further training	Demand turned out to be high. From one training and two exchange meetings a year, organised by the employer, to two additional trainings plus a regular get-together coordinated by the staff themselves , on a rotating basis under the green responsibility hat
Exchange among colleagues	High demand among the seven people in the group. An informal regular meeting now takes place every two months with a rotating host, and without supervisors present. The green responsibility hat is what keeps it from lapsing.
Feedback	The employer wanted more feedback and created two surveys, now run on a fixed rhythm tied to every school holiday: one to the staff, one to the schools and teachers. The first was implemented digitally on the messaging platform the team already uses.
The messaging group	Previously used almost entirely as a broadcast channel from the organisation outwards. Now used dialogically as well.
Cooperation with schools	Improved at the start of the school year through systematic use of the hats. All schools and kindergartens were written to and the hats introduced.
Cooperation with parents	Improved in the same way, through the same systematic introduction at the start of the school year.

The feedback change produced an effect nobody had designed for. The staff had assumed they

had little to do with their supervisors — a natural enough assumption for contractors

working off-site. Being asked for their view, regularly and in a structured way, turned out to matter considerably.

"Before the project, I thought that as independent contractors, we had nothing to do with our bosses, but I've come to trust my supervisors."

— Team member

"The team has become more open to new things. Trust has increased. Tasks are shared out by everyone. Further development is now possible. Other cultures can be integrated." — Head of Department

Why this case matters

Four things are worth drawing out, because each of them appears to generalise.

The team built its own instrument.

The hats were not in any curriculum. They were designed by the people who needed them, in response to a problem they had named themselves — and then refined through use, which is how the other team's feedback tracker developed as well.

The practice moved outwards.

The hats started as an internal clarification and ended up

structuring conversations with parents, teachers, kindergartens and children. This is the widening that Grünfelder and Baumann Montecinos (2024) describe as a cooperation corridor — the space of what a group is able to do together, expanding as shared practices are developed and maintained.

Responsibility shifted. The rotating coordination of the get-together, under the green hat, moved something from the employer to the team. That is the transfer of ownership the methodology aims at, arriving in a concrete and unglamorous form. It happened quickly. The visible changes in team practice were in place within the eight weeks of the Learning Path and the period immediately afterwards.

"We were all very surprised not only by the creative and innovative results but by the speed of real and lasting change." — Facilitator

15.8 What the impact evaluation shows

Four teams have completed the impact evaluation, rating five areas before and after the journey on a scale from 0 to 10.

Change across the five areas, by pilot team

Impact evaluation, September 2026. Scores from 0 to 10.

○ BEFORE ● AFTER



Teams 1 to 3: team consensus scores. Team 4: average of four individual ratings. Where no change was reported, the dots overlap.

Change across the five areas, by pilot team. Impact evaluation, September 2026. Teams 1 to 3 gave team consensus scores; Team 4 is the average of four individual ratings.

Every team reported gains in awareness, trust and shared meanings. The pattern across the five areas:

Area	Mean before	Mean after	Change
Awareness	4.7	6.9	+2.2
Trust	5.3	7.2	+1.9
Growth and resilience	4.3	6.4	+2.1
Shared meanings	4.0	5.9	+1.9
Shared practices	5.4	6.8	+1.4
Overall	4.7	6.6	+1.9

The individual movements are larger than the averages suggest.

One team moved from 1 to 5 on trust; another from 2 to 6 on

growth and resilience; a third from 5.5 to 8.75 on shared practices.

The two instances where no change was reported both started at 7 or above — a different situation from a team that did not move at all.

Two readings are worth drawing out.

Shared meanings and shared practices rose in every team that reported change. These are the two areas that correspond directly to what this handbook means by transcultural competence — the commonalities described in Part 1, Chapter 2. That they moved is the most direct evidence the project has that the approach does what it claims.

Teams with the furthest to travel travelled furthest. The largest gains came from the lowest starting points, which shows the approach is not only for teams that are already collaborating well.

Beyond the measured areas, several outcomes appear consistently: increased confidence in working within diverse teams; concrete practices for collaborating across differences; improved awareness of communication and collaboration styles; and an **intention to apply these practices beyond the pilot.**

Read from the perspective of relational economics this is a

practical result as well as a cultural one — commonalities lower the cost of cooperating, because agreed ways of handling feedback, disagreement or handover mean less is renegotiated each time.

15.9 Variation between teams, and what it asks of facilitation

Engagement varied across teams, along a continuum. At one end, participants primarily identify shared patterns and reproduce information. At the other, teams engage in deeper processes of knowledge transformation, recognising shared needs and developing relational understanding.

This is not a problem to be designed away. It is what any method meets when it reaches real teams with different histories, pressures and starting points. What it means is that **adaptive facilitation matters more than fidelity to a standard sequence.**

In practice, for facilitators:

establish where a team sits on this continuum — the SAT is the instrument for this — and adapt the Learning Path to its degree of maturity (Bell et al., 2012). As Kozlowski and Klein (2000) put it, a phenomenon is emergent when it originates in individuals, is amplified by their interactions, and manifests as a higher-level

collective phenomenon.

Transcultural facilitation is what sustains that progression.

15.10 What teams asked for

A recurring theme in the feedback is a request for stronger facilitation and clearer orientation. Participants wanted more direct guidance in navigating the learning process — to know where they were in it and where it was going.

This is a constructive finding.

Participants were not asking for less of the approach; they were asking to understand where they were in it. A design that generates that request has engaged people enough for them to want the map. Two responses are already in hand: stronger scaffolding for facilitators, and an explicit learning trajectory for participants. See Part 1, Chapter [3.3](#) and Part 3, Chapters [7](#) to [9](#).

THE E-LEARNING SPACE

15.11 How participants experienced it

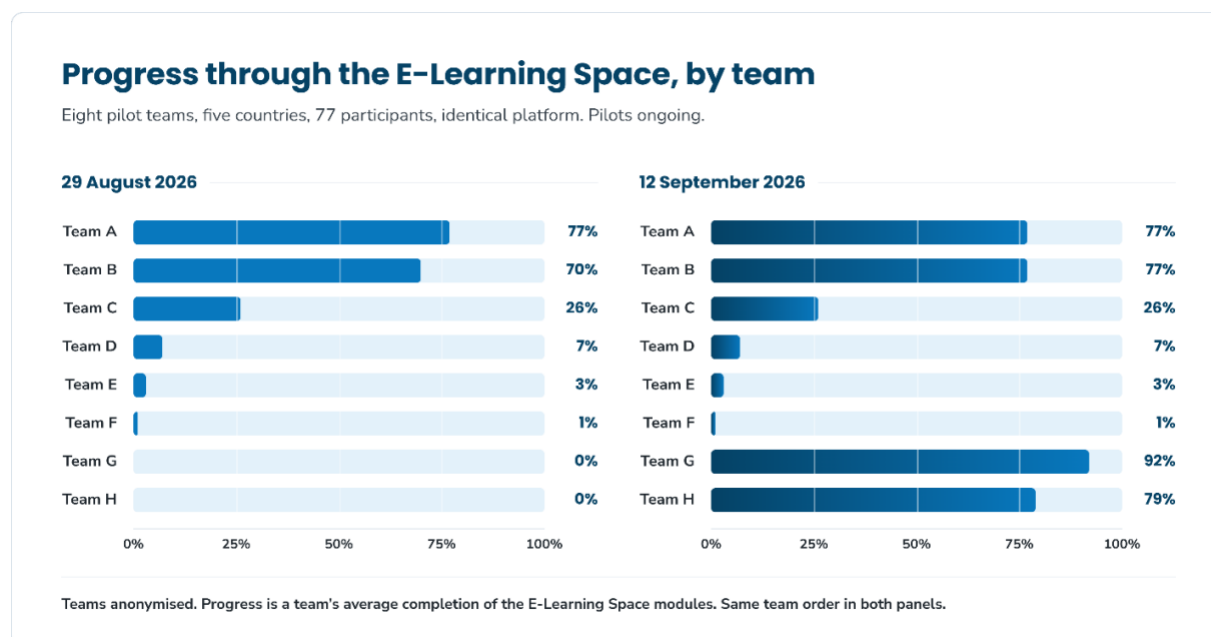
The E-Learning Space is well received. It provides structure and continuity to the learning process and reinforces key concepts introduced during onsite sessions. Participants valued the access it gave them to material they would not otherwise have encountered.

“Knowledge and scientific sources became more important to me.” – Team member

The articulation between the digital and in-person components is where the next iteration of the design will concentrate. Participants experience the two as complementary but not yet fully integrated. Chapter [14](#) examines the question in detail, including the practices that appear to make the difference.

15.12 Engagement: a threshold, not a gradient

The platform data shows something the earlier snapshots did not.



Progress through the E-Learning Space, by team. Eight pilot teams, five countries, 77 participants, identical platform. Teams anonymised; progress is a team's average completion of the modules.

Two teams that had not started on 29 August were at 92% and 79% two weeks later. By 12

September, four of the eight teams had completed 77% or more of the available content. That reframes the engagement question usefully. The variation between teams is not a difference in willingness that shows up slowly over months; it is a threshold that some teams cross and others have not yet crossed. Once a team begins, it tends to move quickly.

What matters is therefore the moment of starting — and Chapter [14](#) shows what makes the difference: whether the E-Learning Space is brought into the

facilitated session itself, or left for participants to find on their own.

OUTLOOKS

15.13 What appears to scale

Five findings emerged from the piloting that we would expect to hold well beyond it.

The SAT scales as a conversation.

Individual responses, collective debrief, action planning. Where that sequence was followed the tool produced priorities; where it was not, it produced a profile.

Feedback and conflict resolution are where the demand is. Over half of all practice selections across eight teams in five countries went to these two.

Anyone designing or facilitating this work should plan for it.

The tools travel; the conditions decide. Eight teams had identical access to the same platform and the same materials. What differed was how the work was introduced, whether the team leader stayed involved, and whether the digital and facilitated parts were connected. This is good news for scaling – nothing needs rebuilding for each context – and it locates the effort correctly, in facilitation and set-up rather than in content production.

Teams can build their own instruments, and they should be encouraged to. The hats and the feedback tracker were designed by the teams that needed them. Neither was in any curriculum. The methodology's job is to create the conditions in which a team invents what it needs, not to supply a catalogue of practices.

The starting point is not a filter.

The largest gains came from the teams with the lowest starting scores, and the case in 15.7 involved staff who were geographically dispersed, contractually distant from their employer, and working across organisational boundaries. The approach is usable by teams that are struggling, not only by teams already collaborating well. Transfer orientation, finally, is a design principle rather than an add-on. The piloting confirmed a simple way of thinking about it, mapped onto the levels at which learning is usually evaluated. The practical corollary is to start with a few small steps and review them during the process rather than only at the end. In the pilots this meant reviews in weeks 5 and 8 and again at the impact evaluation.

Level	Design principle
Reaction	Meaningful – relevant to this team, not to teams in general
Learning	Action-oriented – active practice plus transfer planning
Behaviour	Contextual – adapted to the daily work environment
Results and output	High-transfer – involving the whole team, not selected individuals

15.14 What comes next

The final impact evaluation will extend the dataset as the remaining teams complete their journeys, and will let the project answer three further questions: **how long the practices persist** once the facilitated journey is over, **how far the results transfer** to organisations working without a project behind them, and **whether the design changes made during the piloting** – plainer SAT language, modular use, tighter integration of the E-Learning Space – improved outcomes for the teams that started after them.

The development priorities are already clear from the piloting: tighter integration of the two learning environments, stronger scaffolding for facilitators, and clearer orientation for participants. None is a change of direction. All three were underway before this handbook went to press.

Pause and reflect: Of the findings in this chapter, which would you expect to see in the teams you work with – and which would surprise you?

In a nutshell:

- The SAT was piloted with 36 organisations; 89% found the instructions clear, 83% the content relevant. Its most valuable effect was surfacing differences of perception not previously discussed, and it scales as a conversation, not a questionnaire.
- The Learning Path's most consistent outcome is a shared language for discussing difference, not smoothing it away, closely linked to psychological safety.
- Teams moved from declared organisational narratives toward lived realities, which is what Change of Perspective Part 1 asks of them, appearing here unprompted.
- Over half of all practice selections went to feedback and conflict resolution, across countries and sectors.
- Teams deliberately built new commonalities, including self-designed instruments: a feedback tracker and a set of role hats that went on to reshape onboarding, further training, feedback routines, and cooperation with schools and parents.
- Across four teams, scores rose in all five evaluated areas, with shared meanings and shared practices rising in every team that reported change.
- The E-Learning Space is valued, and engagement with it is a threshold rather than a gradient: two teams went from nothing to near-completion in two weeks.
- What scales: the SAT as a conversation, the demand for feedback and conflict work, the tools' portability, teams' capacity to build their own instruments, transfer orientation as a design principle, and the finding that a low starting point is no barrier.

Key Takeaway: The evidence from the piloting is consistent across countries, sectors and team types. Teams developed a shared language, examined how they work, and built practices that did not exist before, several of which they designed themselves and several of which are still in use and spreading beyond the teams that invented them. What the project has produced is a working method, a documented body of results, and a clear view of where to strengthen it.

Chapter 16: Moving beyond

What to expect from this chapter: What to expect from this chapter: This is the last chapter, and it does something the others do not. Rather than reporting or instructing, it asks what the ELEVATE experience might mean beyond the project itself.

It begins by being clear about what this handbook does not claim. It then names a tension the approach runs into wherever it is used: ELEVATE is built on continuous learning, and most organisational learning is still bought in single days. From there it looks outward, at the sense in which ELEVATE is less an isolated solution than one expression of a shift already under way across the social sciences and the field of intercultural learning.

It ends without concluding — which, for a project about continuous learning, seemed like the only honest option.

16.1 What this handbook does not claim

We began with a claim that is easy to state and hard to act on: that a team is not a collection of individuals from different backgrounds, but a living social system that continuously constructs and reconstructs its own ways of working. Everything since has been an attempt to take that seriously — in how an organisation assesses itself, how a team is prepared, how a facilitator works, and what is measured at the end.

It is worth being clear about the limits.

We do not claim that this approach is finished. Part 4 has

said as much three times over. The digital and facilitated environments are complementary but not yet fully integrated. The identification of commonalities shows promise but remains under-evidenced. Participants asked for more scaffolding than the current design provides. These are not disclaimers appended to a success story; they are the parts of the work still to be done.

We do not claim that the evidence settles the question. Thirty-six organisations used the SAT and eight teams travelled the Learning Path. That is enough to show that something happens, and to say something useful about the conditions under which it happens. It is not enough to say

how much, or for how long, or in what kinds of organisation it would not work at all.

And we do not claim that any of this removes difficulty. The transcultural approach is explicit that developing commonalities may produce tension rather than harmony — that tension is often where the learning is. A team that argues more precisely after this work than it did before has not failed.

What the handbook does offer is a shift in where to look. Away from what people *are* and towards what they are *doing together*. Away from cataloguing difference and towards building the shared meanings and practices that make cooperation possible while difference remains. Away from the workshop as the site of learning and towards the ordinary weeks in between, where practices either take hold or quietly disappear.

That shift has consequences beyond any single team. If commonalities are built as well as found, then the capacity to build them has no natural ceiling — and no prerequisite either. Any team can begin, whatever its composition, because the raw material is the interaction rather than the overlap. **The most durable outcome of a learning journey is therefore not the**

practices a team ends up with. It is the team's capacity to keep making new ones.

16.2 The tension this approach runs into

There is a mismatch between what this handbook asks for and how organisational learning is usually organised, and it is worth naming directly.

The ELEVATE approach rests on continuous processes: relationships, dialogue, reflection, experimentation, collective learning, development over months rather than days. Meanwhile, learning and organisational development in many organisations are still delivered through one-day workshops, short interventions, isolated programmes, temporary initiatives and solutions designed to show results quickly.

Isolated interventions are not useless. They are simply the wrong instrument for this particular job. A single day can raise awareness, introduce a vocabulary, or give a team its first experience of talking about how it works. What it cannot do is embed a practice — because embedding happens in the weeks afterwards, under pressure, when the flip chart has been thrown away. This is the

finding that runs through the whole handbook, and the transfer research behind it is unambiguous: lasting change depends far less on the quality of the learning event than on what happens before and after it (Weinbauer-Heidel, 2016). [Chapter 14](#) showed the same thing at close range, in the gap between the teams that brought the E-Learning Space into their sessions and the six that never opened it.

It would be a mistake to read this as a criticism of organisations or of the practitioners inside them. In our experience the difficulty is almost never unwillingness. It is structural.

Budgets are allocated annually and by activity, so a two-day workshop is easy to fund and a nine-month process is not. Learning is often procured as a service with a defined deliverable, which makes continuous development hard to specify in a contract. Impact is reported on cycles far shorter than the ones over which team practices actually change. Managers are accountable for output, and the time a team spends examining how it works is time it is not producing. People move roles, so the sponsor who commissioned the work is frequently gone before the results appear. And the

practitioners commissioned to help are paid for days delivered, which is a poor instrument for measuring whether anything held.

None of that is anyone's failure of imagination. It is what happens when the structures for buying learning were designed around events and the learning that matters happens between them. **The pressures are real, and pretending otherwise would make this handbook less useful, not more.**

So what follows from it? Not that organisations should wait until conditions improve. Three things, more modestly.

Start where the pressure is lowest and the stakes are real. [Part 1](#) makes this point about a small number of strategically important relationships rather than a transformation programme. The pilot teams that got furthest were not the ones with the most resources; they were the ones that connected the work to something they already cared about.

Design for the gap between events rather than trying to close it. The Team Quest, the transfer goal, the practice with somewhere to live — these exist precisely because the weeks between sessions cannot be supervised. This is not a workaround. It is the

design responding honestly to the conditions it will meet.

Treat the first cycle as the thing that makes the second possible. A team that has been through one practice cycle has something an untrained team does not: the experience of having changed something on purpose. That is the asset. The seven practices are not a curriculum to be completed but a supply of starting points.

Pause and reflect: *Think about how learning is commissioned, funded and reported in your organisation. Which of those structures would have to change for a nine-month team learning process to be as easy to authorise as a one-day workshop? And which of them could you actually influence?*

16.3 ELEVATE as part of something wider

We would like to end by saying something about where we think this work sits, because it would be misleading to present ELEVATE as an isolated invention. It feels much more like one manifestation of a change already under way — in the social sciences, and in the field of intercultural training and learning.

First, the relational turn itself. By taking a relational approach,

ELEVATE recognises the complexity of people as social and cultural beings, and treats relationships as constitutive rather than secondary. This is not a position we arrived at alone. It runs through relational sociology, constructionist psychology, relational economics and, increasingly, sustainability science. Part 1's information box on the relational paradigm sets out the fuller position; what matters here is that ELEVATE is one attempt to make it practical in a specific setting — teams learning to work together across difference. See *Part 1, [Chapter 1](#)*.

Read against that background, several of the shifts this handbook argues for stop looking like ELEVATE's own preferences and start looking like the local expression of a broader movement.

From	To
Fixed competencies to be acquired	Ongoing learning that has no completion point
Cultural categories	Relationships and interaction
Individual adaptation	Collective learning
One-off training	Continuous development
Knowledge transferred	Knowledge created in the encounter
Standardised solutions	Context-sensitive approaches
Separation and comparison	Relationality

These are not slogans, and none of them is a clean break. Each names a shift of emphasis that this handbook has tried to argue and evidence rather than assert – and each of them is visible in the field well beyond this project.

Second, relational ontologies can build bridges. This is the possibility we find most interesting, and the one we can take further in the future.

Relational ways of understanding the world are not the property of any one tradition. They appear across many philosophies and in many parts of the world, including Indigenous knowledge systems, often long before they appeared in European social science.

That shared ground offers a platform for dialogue rather than

a framework to be exported. If relations are primary, then no single tradition owns the account, and traditions that have thought relationally for centuries are participants in the discussion rather than sources of illustration for someone else's model. The relational turn is meanwhile gaining momentum well beyond intercultural learning – from relational economics to sustainability science, where researchers are drawing on it to move away from treating entities as separate and towards continually unfolding processes and relations (West et al., 2020).

The language of transculturality is itself a case in point, and the direction of travel is the reverse of the usual one. In 1940, the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz introduced the term **transculturation** in *Contrapunteo*

cubano del tabaco y el azúcar as an alternative to *acculturation*, which he considered insufficient because it suggested a largely one-directional transition from one culture to another.

Transculturation was intended to capture something more complex: loss, adaptation, exchange, and the emergence of new cultural forms. The concept this handbook is built on has Latin American roots, and it reached European scholarship later rather than the other way round.

Taking that seriously is an ongoing practice of intellectual humility rather than a task that can be completed — and we would not claim to have completed it here.

Third, the shift from human-centred towards more-than-human design. The climate crisis presses on one of design's most fundamental assumptions: who are we actually designing for? Design research is increasingly drawing on approaches that move beyond anthropocentric perspectives, in order to imagine, prototype and negotiate more just multispecies futures (Tironi et al., 2024).

ELEVATE does not go there. But its relational and transcultural focus points in the same direction, and Chapter 14 shows why the step is a short one. Once you accept that a

team's learning is carried by its languages, rooms, platforms, trackers and tools as well as by its people, the boundary around "the human participants" is already less firm than it looked. Part 1's information box follows that thought further than this handbook otherwise does.

This was the endeavour of ELEVATE — not more and not less: to take a relational understanding of culture and make it usable by a team on an ordinary Tuesday, in a specific organisation, with the time and resources it actually has.

Voices from the ELEVATE team

ELEVATE was developed through collaboration between partner organisations with different areas of expertise, contexts and perspectives. The people involved in designing, testing and facilitating the approach brought these perspectives into the development of the Self-Assessment Tool, the Learning Path and the wider methodology.

The following voices reflect on the ideas and practices that shaped ELEVATE. They highlight several principles that run throughout the course: recognising differences

without reducing people to them, identifying commonalities, creating the conditions for cooperation, developing shared practices, and maintaining these practices over time.

Taken together, the reflections also illustrate how the ELEVATE approach connects individual awareness with team development. Transcultural competence is not presented as a fixed set of skills, but as an ongoing way of working with others, learning from differences and developing forms of cooperation that fit a particular team and context.

Testimonial 1: *“The ELEVATE project has been an outstanding journey for me and the [Transcultural Caravan team](#), as it has contributed to translate the transcultural approach into practical tools for organisations and their teams.*

Transcultural competence enables us to get things done in a culturally complex environment, and this is the reality that most of our teams face nowadays. Against this background, we ask questions such as: How can we cooperate, how can we cultivate a sense of belonging in order to succeed together? It is a very pragmatic approach, one that considers cultural complexity as a resource for problem solving and for learning. In a nutshell, this means shifting from a focus on differences to a focus on commonalities, without neglecting the existence and the relevance of differences. Importantly, the transcultural approach is not about homogenisation, similarities or adaptation, but about commonalities: We can be diverse, be who we are, and still collaborate, build a community of practice and create spaces where we can learn from and with each other.

What I hope organisations take away from the ELEVATE project is that it is really possible, and that there is no right and wrong when embarking on a transcultural learning journey. Every team, every context is special, and it is worth looking for respective, tem-specific opportunities for learning and mutual growth."

— Prof. Dr. Julika Baumann Montecinos, Transcultural Caravan, Germany.

Testimonial 2: *"Diversity is not something you can avoid; it just happens. You can decide to actively seek it out, or you can choose to overlook it as a company, but the reality at the end of the day is that people are different. They think, act and behave differently, in many different ways. Simply having diversity doesn't mean anything. It is not enough. Diversity provides the right ingredients, and the ingredients are never enough to have a good meal. What is still missing is the recipe, and that is the ability to create collaborative and inclusive team dynamics. That is where we have focused the Elevate project, and that is when diversity really becomes a tool for progress.*

We are a cooperative company. We are members of our company, and we belong to an even bigger group made up of cooperative enterprises. Mondragon University is all about cooperation; it is the way we work, it is our DNA. Adopting a transcultural approach, the way I understand it, means looking beyond differences and focusing on the purpose, on what brings us together. In Mondragon we have an expression that may not sound natural in English: we are a sum that multiplies."

— Prof. Dr. Naiara Arnaez,, Mondragon University, Spain.

Testimonial 3: *"Diversity doesn't create innovation. It creates tensions first. Only if we create an inclusive environment, only if we have really great psychological safety in the team, can we elevate the potential of diversity and create innovation. That is what ELEVATE is doing. We have four steps where we help teams to recognise what is unique about them, what skills, experience and perspectives they have, and what patterns in their collaboration are sometimes barriers to working better together. Then they create common rituals and shared practices, and in the fourth step they ensure they can really implement what they decided to do.*

If an organisation uses ELEVATE exactly as intended, what I hope is different a year later is that the team no longer needs us. They know how to work better together. They do not treat diversity as a challenge to manage, but as a system of intelligence that they know how to use. I would expect three visible changes. First, people understand each other better, beyond nationalities and job titles and all this visible diversity. Second, they can name their collaboration patterns, because self-awareness is the key to recognising patterns instead of blaming personalities. Third, the team has visible rituals and practices in place: feedback practices, how they deal with conflict, how they learn together and share knowledge on an everyday basis. That would be the ideal scenario: an independent team."

— Anna Zelno, Intercultures España & LATAM and the Academy for Diversity and Innovation.

Testimonial 4: *"The misconception is not really a misconception. It is not realising how tremendously important it is to keep talking. Most of the teams I work with had a moment of setting the rules at the very beginning, and then they think that is it, that is done. What this approach shows people is that it is a constant process. People change, priorities change, goals change, and we ourselves change internally. Those simple elements, let's talk, let's verify, really do matter on a daily basis, and they are a real factor in a team's success.*

The learning I want organisations to take is that differences are good. We need to differ, because we need different perspectives. The most dangerous thing happening right now are the bubbles we are in, where everybody knows the same things, thinks the same way, and everything seems obvious. The word I take from this project is commonalities within the context: how we can talk with each other and meet each other at the point we are at, knowing that we differ.

The moment when we really came together as a project team was one of our face-to-face meetings, when we started to talk about how we understand things and how we approach them, and saw the value in the conversation itself. I really felt the emotions. I really felt that we were a team."

— Agnieszka Kotucz, DConcept, Poland

Testimonial 5: *“For me and our team at the Transcultural Caravan, the ELEVATE project has been a unique transcultural learning journey. I am deeply grateful to have been part of this project, and looking back, I believe it has shown how transcultural competence can be developed in very practical ways for organisations, teams, and individuals.*

The collaborative process of creating this handbook has also taught me the importance of patience, a positive attitude, and a shared direction that remains open to adjustment as a project evolves.

We are a species capable of building something new together.

Transcultural learning is an invitation to use this human capacity: to develop new commonalities – new shared meanings and shared ways of acting – that enable us to continue cooperating and finding solutions in complex times. Cultural diversity is not the problem; it does not even need to create tension first. It is always part of the solution.

For me, one of the greatest needs for a project like ELEVATE is to start and sustain dialogue across cultures – between national, disciplinary, institutional, and professional cultures, but also between the cultures of practice and academia. This is what I believe this project has achieved.

– Assoc. Prof. Dr. Tobias Grünfelder, Transcultural Caravan, Germany.

Testimonial 6: *“Looking back on ELEVATE has made me realise that cultural differences are not always obvious, and that listening and being curious are just as important as having knowledge about other cultures and realities. Transcultural competence is something you continuously develop through experience, reflection and meaningful interactions with others; the unit of analysis is the relation itself, and I now try to train myself in questioning my own assumptions and adapting the way I communicate with people from different backgrounds.*

Listening to different perspectives and being open to other ways of thinking helped me understand how important communication, flexibility and respect are in practice. My main takeaway is that you don’t need to have all the answers. Being transculturally competent starts with being willing to listen and understand others without judging them, and searching for commonalities together.

The collaborative and practical approach of ELEVATE is very much in line with our own methodology, where students are teampreneurs and naturally work in teams. I hope we can continue applying and developing these kinds of approaches in the future, as they prepare students well for an increasingly diverse business environment."

— Siv Bermeosolo Salterain, coordinator at Mondragon Team Academy, Mondragon Unibertsitatea, Spain.

Testimonial 7: *"A genuine sense of belonging cannot exist if we ask people to stop being what they were before. You cannot come to a new place and become a new self, because there is a lot of old self inside you. You cannot just flip a button and load a new program. One of the things that allows people to belong to a place more smoothly is not forcing them to stop belonging somewhere else. When somebody moves abroad, in the first few years you are still from the old country. Then there is a phase where you no longer really know where you belong. And if you stay long enough, you belong to the new country more than the old one. It happens naturally. So for a better sense of belonging, it is that: not to stop belonging, not to create a void between the old and the new. Our biggest contribution to the project may have been precisely that we are a non-profit cooperative, so our perspective is not so much entrepreneurial. We bring an additional view, one that helps anchor the project in the vast reality of society rather than only in the corporate environment.*

The principles of transculturality that became the core of ELEVATE have a big impact in society. Here in Luxembourg, half the population is from abroad and seventy per cent was not born here, so this idea of the other, of how we can integrate, is very important. ELEVATE opens the door to reasoning that can help us build a better society together. There is a slogan by an association in Luxembourg: to build a society together."

— Mário Lobo, deReso, Luxembourg.

Across these accounts, several of the principles explored throughout the ELEVATE course come into focus: recognising differences without reducing people to them,

identifying common ground, and creating the conditions for cooperation to become a shared practice.

The reflections also reinforce a point made throughout the earlier chapters: team development does not end with recognising a pattern or reaching an agreement. What is agreed in a session needs to be carried into everyday practice and sustained within the team's own context for change to take hold.

The partners' voices close the learning journey described in this handbook. They show how the principles were understood and developed through practice, and how they took different forms across the contexts and experiences each partner brought to the project.

16.4 What we are handing on

Which leaves the questions this handbook cannot answer, and does not try to.

What happens to a team's capacity to learn together when the pressure does not let up? What does this work look like in organisations with far fewer resources than the pilots had? Which parts of the approach survive translation into contexts, languages and institutional cultures the project never reached? What would it take for an organisation to treat the quality of its everyday collaboration as seriously as it treats its output?

And the question that runs underneath all of them: in a period when the pull towards seeing difference as threat is getting stronger rather than weaker, what is the value of a body of practice built on the opposite assumption?

We do not think these are rhetorical questions. They are the next stage of the work, and they belong as much to the people using this handbook as to the people who wrote it.

We would rather end here than on a summary. Not because the work is unfinished in a way that embarrasses us, but because a project arguing that learning has no completion point should not pretend to have reached one.

What we can say is that change turned out to be possible in ordinary teams, under ordinary conditions, through nothing more exotic than sustained attention to how people work together. Teams that had never discussed how they make decisions started doing so. Teams that had avoided disagreement found ways to have it. Practices that did not exist a year earlier became the way things are done. None of that required a transformation programme. It required someone to start, and a structure to keep going. That is a modest claim, and we think it is the encouraging one.

A closing invitation: The first page of this handbook asked what brought you here, and suggested keeping the answer in mind.

It is worth returning to now. What would you want to be different in a year — in your own practice, in one team, in your organisation? And what is the smallest thing you could start next week?

The approach only comes alive when someone translates it into their own reality. That part was never ours to do.

In a nutshell:

- The handbook does not claim to be finished, to have settled the evidence, or to have removed difficulty. All three limits are stated rather than hedged.
- What it offers is a shift in where to look: from what people are to what they are doing together, and from the workshop to the weeks in between.
- There is a real tension between an approach built on continuous learning and organisations that mostly commission learning in single days. The obstacles are structural, not attitudinal.
- Three responses follow: start small and where the stakes are real, design for the gap between events rather than trying to close it, and treat the first practice cycle as what makes the second possible.
- ELEVATE is one expression of a wider relational turn across the social sciences and intercultural learning, not an isolated invention.
- Relational thinking exists across many philosophies and Indigenous knowledge systems, which makes it a possible path towards a more inclusive field. Transculturality's own roots are Latin American.
- The handbook ends with questions rather than answers, because a project about continuous learning should not claim a conclusion.

Key takeaway: The most durable outcome of a learning journey is not the practices a team ends up with. It is the team's capacity to keep making new ones — and that capacity, once built, belongs to the team rather than to the method, the facilitator or the project.

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