

# ABOUT THE 5 DESIGN MECHANISMS

## Understanding How Transformation Happens

Climate and biodiversity transformation depends on far more than technical solutions, scientific evidence, financial resources, or political commitments. Across sectors, countries, and governance levels, many transformation efforts succeed or fail because of **how people understand challenges, make decisions, cooperate, communicate, build trust, navigate uncertainty, sustain motivation, and translate intentions into action.**

*These underlying processes can be understood as transformation mechanisms: recurring pathways through which interventions influence human behavior, social dynamics, institutional functioning, and collective outcomes.*






Mechanisms help explain why an intervention works – or fails to work. For example, a stakeholder workshop may succeed not because people simply exchanged information, but because it improved shared understanding, strengthened trust, increased psychological safety, or created a stronger sense of collective agency. Similarly, a communication campaign may succeed because it shifts social norms, strengthens identification, increases perceived efficacy, or creates emotional engagement.

Understanding these mechanisms allows practitioners, policymakers, organizations, and funders to **move beyond activities and outputs and focus on the psychological conditions and outcomes** that make the impact of transformation more likely.

## The Focus of the Design Mechanisms

This framework focuses specifically on **psychological mechanisms of transformation.**

The framework identifies five clusters of mechanisms:

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**Sense-Making Mechanisms** – helping people understand complexity, uncertainty, and pathways for action.
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**Relational Mechanisms** – strengthening trust, cooperation, and legitimacy.
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**Emotional & Resilience Mechanisms** – supporting well-being, resilience, and long-term engagement.
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**Implementation & Agency Mechanisms** – enabling people and organizations to translate intentions into sustained action.
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**Narrative & Communication Mechanisms** – shaping meaning, relevance, trust, and engagement through communication.

Together, these mechanisms represent forms of psychological infrastructure that influence how effectively transformation processes function across individuals, organizations, communities, governance systems, and societies.

Rather than asking:

*What intervention should we implement?*

the framework encourages asking:

*Which psychological mechanisms are currently missing, weak, or underdeveloped?*

## How the Mechanisms Relate to the Challenges and Domains

The Design Mechanisms complement the Infrastructure Challenges and Psychological Domains presented earlier.

While the Infrastructure Challenges identify recurring transformation bottlenecks and the Psychological Domains explain the underlying psychological dynamics, the Design Mechanisms provide **practical approaches for strengthening transformation capacity**.

*A single Design Mechanism may contribute to multiple Domains and help solving multiple Challenges, and most transformation processes require several mechanisms working together.*

For example, strengthening cooperation may require trust-building, dialogue, fairness processes, social norms, accountability structures, and psychological safety simultaneously.

The purpose of the Mechanisms is therefore not to prescribe fixed solutions, but to provide a **practical toolbox** for designing interventions, strengthening psychological infrastructure, and supporting more effective transformation processes.

## Mechanisms Beyond the Scope of This Framework

Psychological mechanisms are only one part of transformation.

Many other mechanisms influence climate and biodiversity outcomes and remain critically important. This framework does not attempt to provide a complete theory of transformation or governance. Instead, it focuses on the psychological dimensions that are often overlooked despite their significant influence on implementation and outcomes. Examples of important mechanisms outside the primary scope of this framework include:

### **Financial & Economic Mechanisms**

Such as carbon pricing, subsidies, grants, funding schemes, insurance systems, procurement mechanisms, and other forms of economic incentives and resource allocation.

### **Regulatory & Institutional Mechanisms**

Such as laws, regulations, mandates, standards, enforcement systems, reporting requirements, governance arrangements, and formal accountability structures.

### **Technological & Infrastructure Mechanisms**

Such as renewable energy technologies, transportation systems, digital platforms, monitoring systems, data infrastructure, and technological innovation.

### Resource & Capacity Mechanisms

Such as funding, staffing, expertise, technical assistance, education, training, organizational capacity, and access to resources.

These mechanisms remain essential. However, their effectiveness is often shaped by the psychological conditions through which they are experienced, interpreted, and implemented.

## The Purpose of the Design Mechanisms








Psychological mechanisms should **not be understood as substitutes for structural change**. People cannot simply be motivated, persuaded, or trained into overcoming structural barriers. Likewise, structural interventions often fail when psychological dynamics are ignored.

Effective transformation typically emerges from the interaction between psychological, structural, technological, and resource-based mechanisms.

The purpose of the Design Mechanisms is therefore not to replace policy, governance, finance, or technology. Rather, they help make visible the psychological conditions that influence whether transformation efforts **succeed, scale, and endure over time**. Together, the Mechanisms provide a practical foundation for intervention design, governance innovation, leadership development, organizational change, participation processes, implementation efforts, and systems transformation.

## How to Read the Design Mechanisms

Each Design Mechanism is structured around seven elements:

-  **Why It Matters** – why the mechanism cluster is important for transformation
-  **Mechanism & Purpose** – the specific mechanism and its intended function
-  **Typical Signals** – situations where the mechanism may be needed
-  **Sub-Mechanisms** – the key processes through which the mechanism operates
-  **Example Impact** – potential outcomes associated with effective application
-  **Tips for Success** – guidance for effective application
-  **Risks & Misapplications** – guidance for common pitfalls to avoid

The goal is not to prescribe universal solutions. Rather, the Mechanisms provide a practical toolbox for identifying leverage points, designing interventions, and strengthening the psychological infrastructure needed for effective climate and biodiversity transformation.