



The Cross-System Improvement Framework

Conversation toolkit

Supported by



Hosted by





Contents

Contents

About the Framework

Cross-System Framework

Who is this for?

Introduction to Framework

Creating the conditions

Delivering transformation

How to use the Framework

Who to involve

Finding a starting point

Questions for Discussion

All Domains

Collective Vision and Leadership

Aligned Operating Model

Capability, Connections, Culture

System and Pathway Redesign

Continuous Quality Improvement

Targeted Innovation

Activities

The Framework in Action

About the Cross-System Improvement Framework	3	Questions for discussion	13
Cross-System Improvement Framework	4	All domains	19
Who is this for?	5	Creating balance across the domains	32
Introduction to the Framework	7	Exercise: Understanding your collective activity	34
Creating the conditions	8	Exercise: Moving to action	35
Delivering transformation	9	Optional exercise: Creating a shared narrative	36
How to use the Framework	10	The Framework in action	37
Who to involve	11		
Finding a starting point	12		



About the Cross-System Improvement Framework

Contents

About the Framework

Cross-System Framework

Who is this for?

Introduction to Framework

Creating the conditions

Delivering transformation

How to use the Framework

Who to involve

Finding a starting point

Questions for Discussion

All Domains

Collective Vision and Leadership

Aligned Operating Model

Capability, Connections, Culture

System and Pathway Redesign

Continuous Quality Improvement

Targeted Innovation

Activities

The Framework in Action

The Cross-System Improvement Framework is a practical tool to help leaders work together across health and care organisations to deliver meaningful, lasting change. It was developed with input from leaders across the UK and Ireland and is designed to support joined-up planning and improvement across systems.

The Framework breaks down six key types of activity to help teams understand what's involved in a taking a whole system improvement approach. The accompanying toolkit gives you and your team a clear, structured way to understand the activities needed when working across multiple organisations and helps you identify what's working well and where you may need to prioritise at a system level.

It's especially useful for leadership teams responsible for strategy, planning, and improvement across health and care. Using the Framework helps build a shared understanding of priorities, encourages collaboration, and supports better use of resources.

This guide can be used for reflection in team sessions, shaping improvement plans, and aligning efforts with wider system goals.

Ultimately, it's designed to help leaders make sense of complex work and drive change that benefits communities.

How we define Cross-System improvement:

Transformation and enabling large scale change in health and care is complex work and hard to navigate especially as single organisations and teams. Working at a systems level means intentionally working across multiple organisations, different sectors and geographies to create the conditions and change required to improve health outcomes for the population.

The Cross-System Improvement Framework © 2026 by Q is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. To view a copy of this license, visit creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/



The Cross-System Improvement Framework

Contents

About the Framework

Cross-System Framework

Who is this for?

Introduction to Framework

Creating the conditions

Delivering transformation

How to use the Framework

Who to involve

Finding a starting point

Questions for Discussion

All Domains

Collective Vision and Leadership

Aligned Operating Model

Capability, Connections, Culture

System and Pathway Redesign

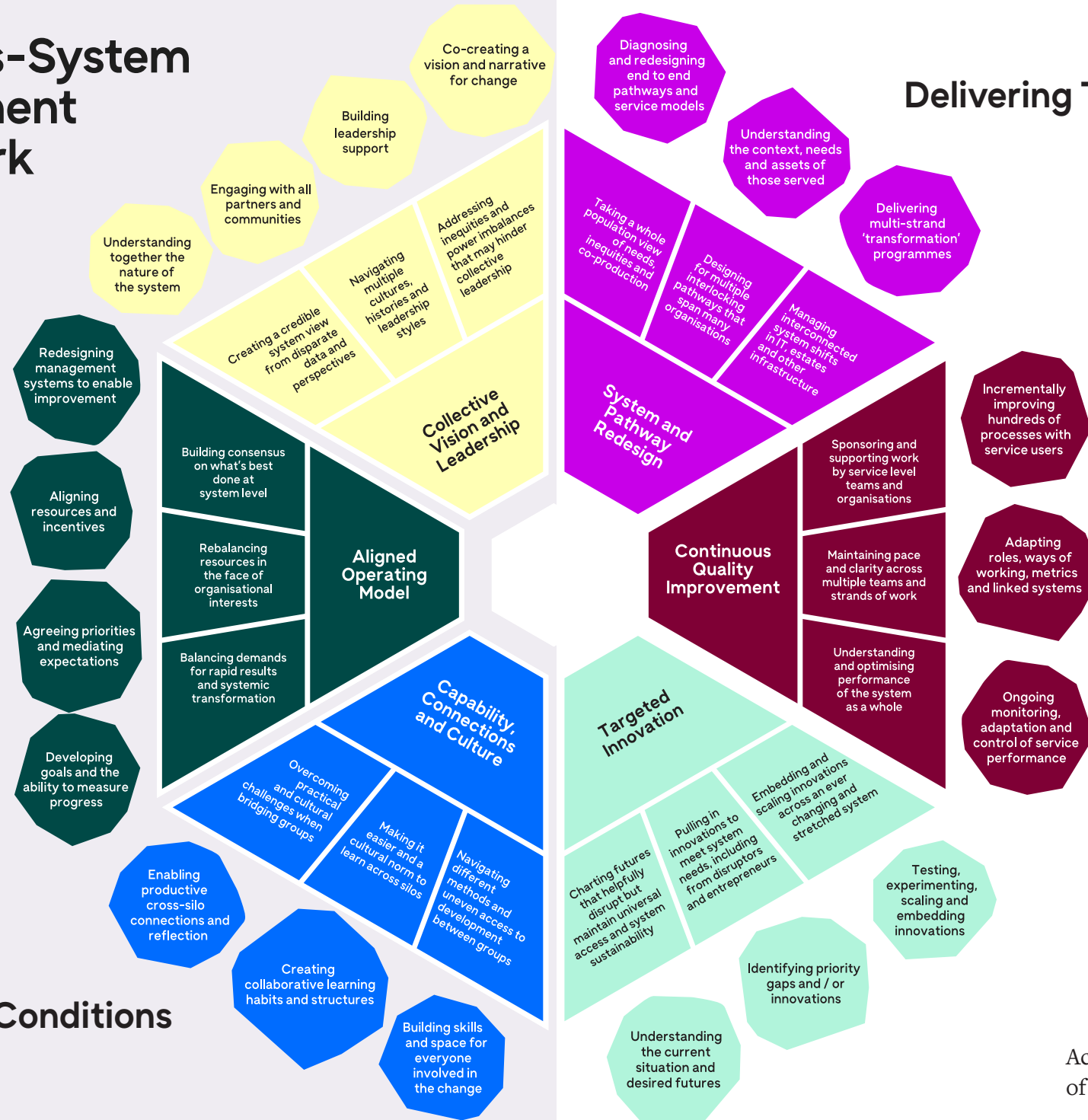
Continuous Quality Improvement

Targeted Innovation

Activities

The Framework in Action

Delivering Transformation



Creating the Conditions

Access a larger pdf version of the Framework [here](#)



Who is this for?

This Framework is for senior leaders leading improvement and transformation across health and care. You may be in an Integrated Care Board, Commissioning Organisation, National or Regional Organisation, Provider Trust, Health Board, Local Authority, Social Care or a Voluntary, Community or Social Enterprise.

To understand what is happening across your work, start by engaging with people in your senior leadership or executive team who are responsible for resource allocation, planning, improvement and delivering strategy and large-scale change.

We then suggest you bring in wider system partners. These are people you collaborate with to help you decide which system priorities to focus on, and to make sure you focus your energy where it will have the most impact for communities you work with.

Context:

Tackling large-scale change is messy. It is hard to hold both the complexity and totality of the system, and still find space to make progress. It requires advanced collaboration skills to work with people from different organisations and it can be challenging to work with competing priorities. You'll need to bring people with you, and juggle short term needs with taking a longer-term view, all while focusing operational delivery.

You may be asking:

- Where do I start?
- Who and how do I bring different parts of the system together?
- How do I understand how our efforts add up to system transformation?

- Contents
- About the Framework
- Cross-System Framework
- Who is this for?
- Introduction to Framework
- Creating the conditions
- Delivering transformation
- How to use the Framework
- Who to involve
- Finding a starting point
- Questions for Discussion
- All Domains
- Collective Vision and Leadership
- Aligned Operating Model
- Capability, Connections, Culture
- System and Pathway Redesign
- Continuous Quality Improvement
- Targeted Innovation
- Activities
- The Framework in Action



Contents

About the Framework

Cross-System Framework

Who is this for?

Introduction to Framework

Creating the conditions

Delivering transformation

How to use the Framework

Who to involve

Finding a starting point

Questions for Discussion

All Domains

Collective Vision and Leadership

Aligned Operating Model

Capability, Connections, Culture

System and Pathway Redesign

Continuous Quality Improvement

Targeted Innovation

Activities

The Framework in Action

What is it and what will it do?

The Cross-System Improvement Framework toolkit is designed to help you bring your team together to explore how improvement can drive system-wide change and how it can play a more strategic role.

You can use the toolkit to run sessions that:

- Make sense of where you are and what's needed next.
- Create shared understanding around a system-wide approach to improvement.
- Identify where you're putting your effort and what else needs attention.

There are individual and group reflective questions and activities for you to work through.

Why we created the Framework

The Cross-System Improvement Framework was built by the Q team with senior leaders from across UK and Ireland, and with input from experts in large scale change, in 2023. It is designed to align with existing frameworks used nationally and internationally. It builds on evidence from team and organisational approaches to improvement to identify what's distinctive when working across multiple organisations to deliver large scale change. It introduces six domains that come together to improve care. While work in these domains often happens in silos, we believe impact is greater when there is better collective awareness and they are combined coherently.

We recognise that the role of improvement is shifting. There is potential for this framework to connect activities that may be described as innovation, transformation, redesign, Organisational Development or systems change. Rather than prescribe what system-wide improvement should be, we hope the toolkit provides space and a structured approach for people to come together to collectively decide what the role of improvement should be in their specific context.

We hope people use the toolkit and share learning and feedback with us so the Framework can evolve over time.

You can contact us via email:
q@thenhsalliance.org



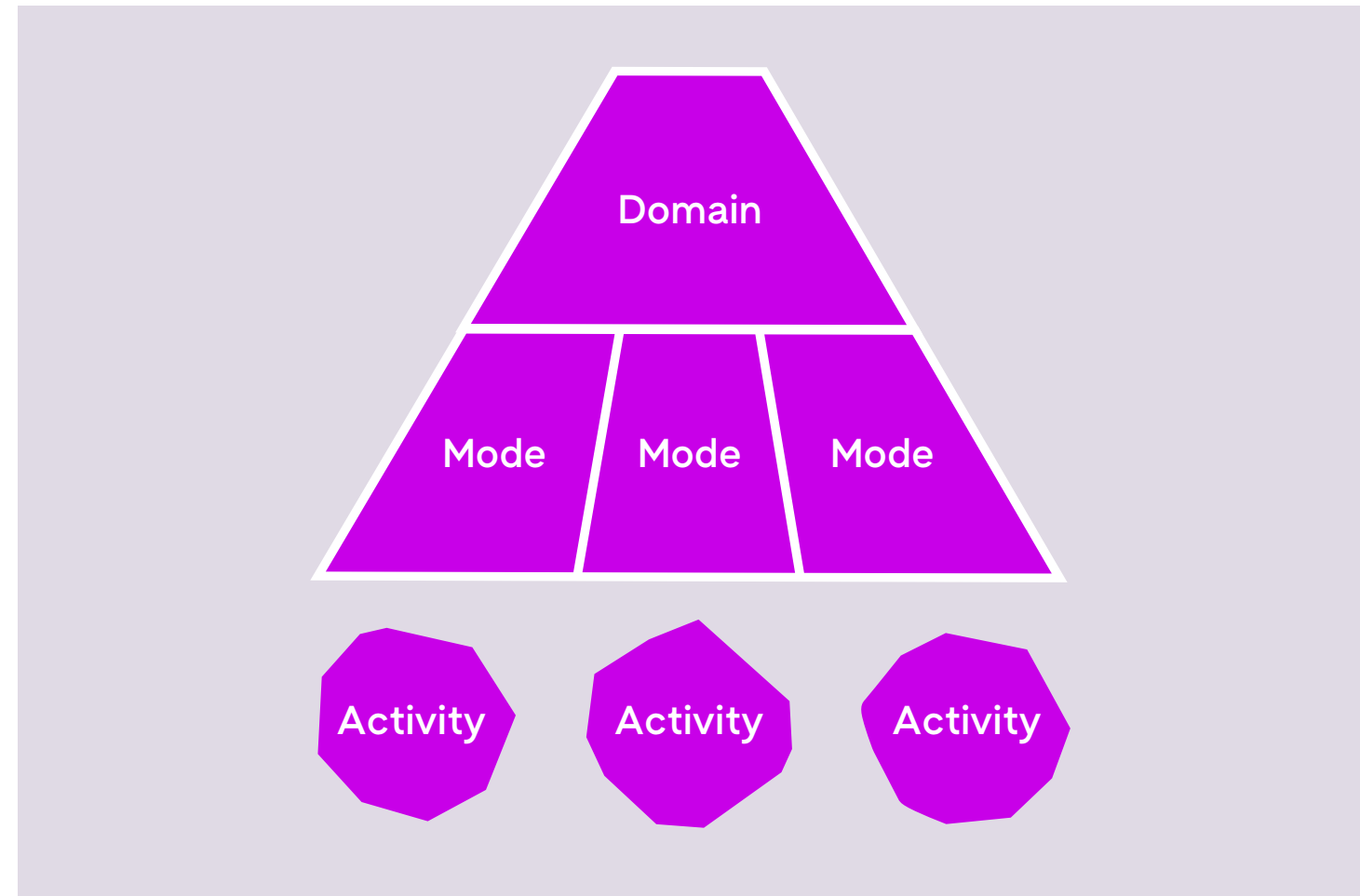
Introduction to the Framework

The Framework is made of two halves. It is also structured across three levels to help teams understand and organise their improvement work:

Domains: These are the six core areas of work that support system improvement. Together, they describe the types of work needed to create the conditions for effective change and deliver transformation.

Modes: These considerations are associated with doing improvement activity at a scale that spans multiple organisations in a system.

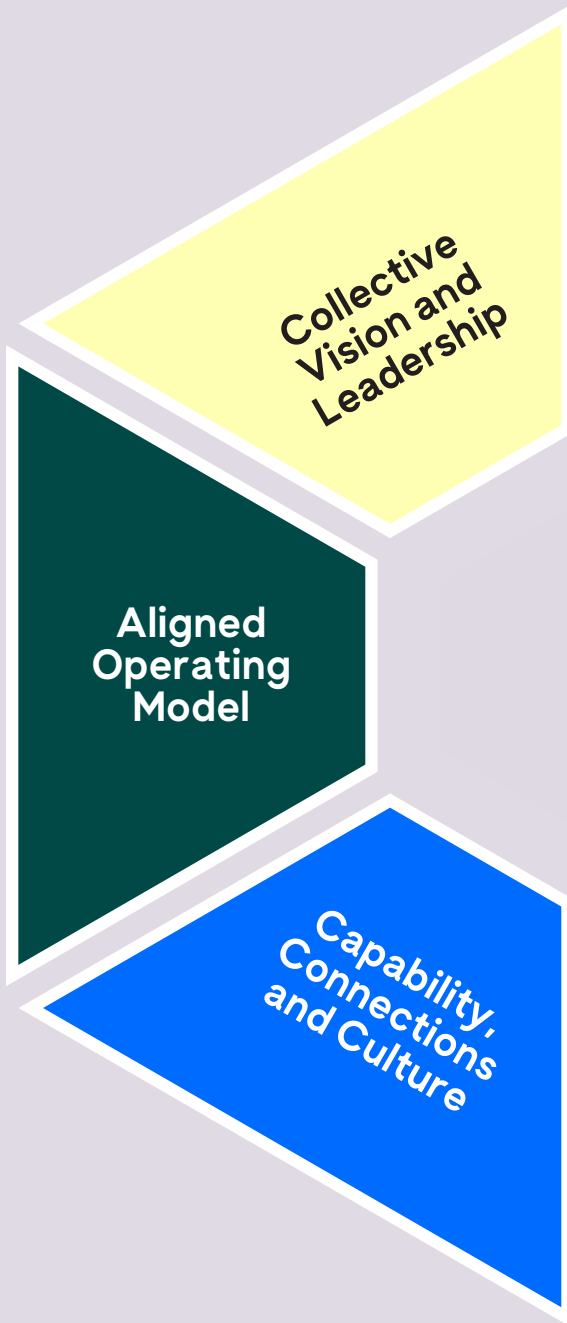
Activities: These areas are relevant to teams and organisations delivering improvement.



- Contents
- About the Framework
- Cross-System Framework
- Who is this for?
- Introduction to Framework
- Creating the conditions
- Delivering transformation
- How to use the Framework
- Who to involve
- Finding a starting point
- Questions for Discussion
- All Domains
- Collective Vision and Leadership
- Aligned Operating Model
- Capability, Connections, Culture
- System and Pathway Redesign
- Continuous Quality Improvement
- Targeted Innovation
- Activities
- The Framework in Action



Contents
About the Framework
Cross-System Framework
Who is this for?
Introduction to Framework
Creating the conditions
Delivering transformation
How to use the Framework
Who to involve
Finding a starting point
Questions for Discussion
All Domains
Collective Vision and Leadership
Aligned Operating Model
Capability, Connections, Culture
System and Pathway Redesign
Continuous Quality Improvement
Targeted Innovation
Activities
The Framework in Action



Creating the conditions

The first three domains describe what is needed to create the conditions for effective change. Focusing on these elements is important for success. The Framework is a cycle rather than sequential. An improvement approach creates opportunities to build skills, vision, and ways of working as you implement changes

Collective Vision and Leadership: As a leadership team, your role is to set a clear and purposeful direction that brings together people from all the organisations and communities in the system. You need to make sure the right leadership is in place for that change to happen.

Capabilities, Connections and Culture: To sustain change we need to create the conditions for learning and collaboration. This means investing in people's capabilities and making space for teams to reflect, share and learn together.

Aligning Operating Model: Your team needs to prioritise the work that matters most and make sure that incentives, systems and structures are coordinated. This is about taking a systematic approach to embed improvement as the core way your organisation operates.



Contents

About the Framework

Cross-System Framework

Who is this for?

Introduction to Framework

Creating the conditions

Delivering transformation

How to use the Framework

Who to involve

Finding a starting point

Questions for Discussion

All Domains

Collective Vision and Leadership

Aligned Operating Model

Capability, Connections, Culture

System and Pathway Redesign

Continuous Quality Improvement

Targeted Innovation

Activities

The Framework in Action



Delivering transformation

These three domains reflect the depth and scale of approaches needed to create sustainable change across multiple organisations. This includes complex redesign of pathways and infrastructure across providers, alongside effective continuous improvement of services and effective scaling of innovation to meet current and future needs of communities.

System and Pathway Redesign:

Build a deep understanding of your local context, population needs, and available assets. Use this insight to accurately diagnose key challenges and lay the foundation for co-designed change. Take a population-wide view by aligning infrastructure with programmes to uncover and tackle inequities head-on.

Continuous Quality Improvement:

Drive improvement through an iterative, data-led approach. Empower teams to solve service-level challenges using real-time data and continuously monitor and refine solutions to ensure lasting impact.

Targeted Innovation: Stay ahead by actively scanning the horizon for emerging needs and opportunities. Create space for your team to experiment, test new ideas. When successful, scale and embed innovations that meet both current and future population needs.

For targeted innovation, there are significant roles to create an ecosystem that brings together disruptors and entrepreneurs that supports teams to identify promising innovations or delivery gaps. We need to systematically experiment and potentially scale to make sure universal access is maintained and support future population health needs.



How to use the Framework

Collaboration is key to system-wide working and using the Framework in practice. You need to identify who leads the work across the different domains and invite them to be involved and share their perspective. Not all the content will be relevant to every system partner and there may be things to add in.

We recommend using the Framework flexibly to build on existing assets and conversations rather than as a prescription for, or assessment of, your system. It can be used as part of strategy planning, development and implementation to reflect and deepen your awareness and understanding of the assets and capabilities you can build on, and challenges you want to address.

This toolkit provides a series of questions and supports conversations. So, the depth and value will depend on your system maturity and the quality of relationships between system partners.

You can start with a reflection exercise with people in your team to help you think about your roles contributes to wider system improvement. You can use printouts and online whiteboards to help facilitate the conversations.

The aim of the toolkit is support you to create a shared view of your system. If you would like structured tailored support to explore this Framework in depth with your system partners and translate it into a practical action plan, please get in touch with the Q team about System Improvement Support.

Contact us: q@thenhsalliance.org.

Recommended ways to use the Framework:

Team reflection:

- Start by building your team's understanding of system-wide improvement.

Select a domain to start with:

- This could be helpful for teams who have a clear understanding of a system issue that needs to improve. Eg if you're looking for clarity on strategic system goals to inform place work, start with 'shared vision and leadership'.

Whole system approach:

- Work through all the domains in a full day or a series of smaller workshops to gain a whole system view.



Who to involve

You can start with a reflection exercise with people in your team to help you think about your roles contributes to wider system improvement.

By the end of this exercise, you should have a sense of who is responsible for different parts of the system, some awareness of what you all bring, and who else you may need to work with to build a full picture of different activity across your system.

Exercise: Understanding our roles

This exercise aims to help people responsible for different parts of the system to understand how they see their role in relation to others and the wider system. You may wish to record the outputs of this conversation on an online whiteboard or document to refer back to as your discussions continue.

Self-reflection:

- What is my formal role and remit?
- How does my work contribute to system-wide improvement?
- Can I see activities I am responsible for in the Framework?
- What are the biggest challenges I face working across system boundaries?
- Where do I have the greatest influence to drive change?

Pair discussion:

- Share reflections with a colleague in a different role or part of the system.
- What similarities and differences emerge?

Group debrief:

- What role gaps or overlaps exist?
- What patterns or themes are emerging?
- Are there any areas where we might need more clarity on who does what?

Contents

About the Framework

Cross-System Framework

Who is this for?

Introduction to Framework

Creating the conditions

Delivering transformation

How to use the Framework

Who to involve

Finding a starting point

Questions for Discussion

All Domains

Collective Vision and Leadership

Aligned Operating Model

Capability, Connections, Culture

System and Pathway Redesign

Continous Quality Improvement

Targeted Innovation

Activities

The Framework in Action



Finding a starting point

If you have already identified as a system what you want to work through together, find the domain that it corresponds to and start there. Assuming you have agreed this objective together in advance, we suggest two hours for this exercise to work through one domain.

We recommend you come back to the Framework as your work progresses to address the other domains.

If you are taking a whole system approach, we suggest you create shared understanding and cover all 6 domains and group reflection in one workshop, then follow up with actions in another workshop. This gives some time for the group to reflect on the content in between.

Whatever your starting point, you will need a facilitator who understands the Framework content and can guide people through exercises.

Exercise: Creating awareness of Cross-System improvement activity

Objective: This exercise is about understanding what you are doing and what is working well in each domain.

- As a group, spend some time looking at the domain and working through the questions together. There is no right or wrong answer, it's a chance to explore what happens at various levels of the system.
- Either print out or create an online whiteboard with the following tables and record the conversation.

Contents

About the Framework

Cross-System Framework

Who is this for?

Introduction to Framework

Creating the conditions

Delivering transformation

How to use the Framework

Who to involve

Finding a starting point

Questions for Discussion

All Domains

Collective Vision and Leadership

Aligned Operating Model

Capability, Connections, Culture

System and Pathway Redesign

Continous Quality Improvement

Targeted Innovation

Activities

The Framework in Action



Contents

About the Framework

Cross-System Framework

Who is this for?

Introduction to Framework

Creating the conditions

Delivering transformation

How to use the Framework

Who to involve

Finding a starting point

Questions for Discussion

All Domains

Collective Vision and Leadership

Aligned Operating Model

Capability, Connections, Culture

System and Pathway Redesign

Continuous Quality Improvement

Targeted Innovation

Activities

The Framework in Action

Collective Vision and Leadership

Your reflections

What's happening?
(As an individual, team,
organisation or system)

Are there differences
when you look at these
questions from an
organisational or
a system view?

What would you like
to build on?

What are some of the
issues or patterns you
have noticed?

What assumptions or
questions do you have?

Questions for discussion

- Who is the shared vision for and what purpose does it serve?
- How are system leaders unlocking resources and addressing barriers to change to galvanise action?
- How do the leadership team work together to enable cross-professional, functional and organisational working?





Contents

About the Framework

Cross-System Framework

Who is this for?

Introduction to Framework

Creating the conditions

Delivering transformation

How to use the Framework

Who to involve

Finding a starting point

Questions for Discussion

All Domains

Collective Vision and Leadership

Aligned Operating Model

Capability, Connections, Culture

System and Pathway Redesign

Continuous Quality Improvement

Targeted Innovation

Activities

The Framework in Action

Aligned Operating Model

What's happening?
(As an individual, team,
organisation or system)

Are there differences
when you look at these
questions from an
organisational or
a system view?

What would you like
to build on?

What are some of the
issues or patterns you
have noticed?

What assumptions or
questions do you have?

Your reflections

Questions for discussion

- What structures are in place to align financial incentives and resources to build consensus of what's best done at a system level?
- How are the leadership team able to prioritise and make decisions to set system level priorities that balance demand between short, medium and long term goals?
- How would you collectively describe the approach you take to plan, deliver, monitor, and improve your work?





Contents

About the Framework

Cross-System Framework

Who is this for?

Introduction to Framework

Creating the conditions

Delivering transformation

How to use the Framework

Who to involve

Finding a starting point

Questions for Discussion

All Domains

Collective Vision and Leadership

Aligned Operating Model

Capability, Connections, Culture

System and Pathway Redesign

Continuous Quality Improvement

Targeted Innovation

Activities

The Framework in Action

Capability, Connections and Culture

Your reflections

What's happening?
(As an individual, team,
organisation or system)

Are there differences
when you look at these
questions from an
organisational or
a system view?

What would you like
to build on?

What are some of the
issues or patterns you
have noticed?

What assumptions or
questions do you have?

Questions for discussion

- How would you describe the current level of capability and maturity across the system?
- How do you currently draw on workforce skills and assets?
- How do you navigate different organisational cultures across your system?
- What is the infrastructure that supports develop collaborative learning structures and processes?





Contents

About the Framework

Cross-System Framework

Who is this for?

Introduction to Framework

Creating the conditions

Delivering transformation

How to use the Framework

Who to involve

Finding a starting point

Questions for Discussion

All Domains

Collective Vision and Leadership

Aligned Operating Model

Capability, Connections, Culture

System and Pathway Redesign

Continuous Quality Improvement

Targeted Innovation

Activities

The Framework in Action

System and Pathway Redesign

Your reflections

What's happening?
(As an individual, team,
organisation or system)

Are there differences
when you look at these
questions from an
organisational or
a system view?

What would you like
to build on?

What are some of the
issues or patterns you
have noticed?

What assumptions or
questions do you have?

Questions for discussion

- To what extent are your system redesign programmes aligned with your system goals?
- How much is your work driven by best practice, clinical guidance, policy directives?
- When taking a population-wide view what inequities are visible and what do you need to surface more clearly?
- How well do your governance processes and financial mechanisms and infrastructure support delivery of multistrand transformation programmes?





Contents

About the Framework

Cross-System Framework

Who is this for?

Introduction to Framework

Creating the conditions

Delivering transformation

How to use the Framework

Who to involve

Finding a starting point

Questions for Discussion

All Domains

Collective Vision and Leadership

Aligned Operating Model

Capability, Connections, Culture

System and Pathway Redesign

Continuous Quality Improvement

Targeted Innovation

Activities

The Framework in Action

Continuous Quality Improvement

Your reflections

What's happening?
(As an individual, team,
organisation or system)

Are there differences
when you look at these
questions from an
organisational or
a system view?

What would you like
to build on?

What are some of the
issues or patterns you
have noticed?

What assumptions or
questions do you have?

Questions for discussion

- How are frontline improvement projects informed by data and experience and measured?
- What infrastructure and processes supports front line improvement efforts?
- How do improvement efforts get embedded and sustained to achieve collective impact across the system?





Contents

About the Framework

Cross-System Framework

Who is this for?

Introduction to Framework

Creating the conditions

Delivering transformation

How to use the Framework

Who to involve

Finding a starting point

Questions for Discussion

All Domains

Collective Vision and Leadership

Aligned Operating Model

Capability, Connections, Culture

System and Pathway Redesign

Continuous Quality Improvement

Targeted Innovation

Activities

The Framework in Action

Targeted Innovation

Your reflections

What's happening?
(As an individual, team,
organisation or system)

Are there differences
when you look at these
questions from an
organisational or
a system view?

What would you like
to build on?

What are some of the
issues or patterns you
have noticed?

What assumptions or
questions do you have?

Questions for discussion

- How are needs identified and innovations brought into the system to support future models of care?
- What mechanisms and incentives to facilitate the spread of innovations?
- Where does capability to test, evaluate, prototype, and implement innovations sit in the system?

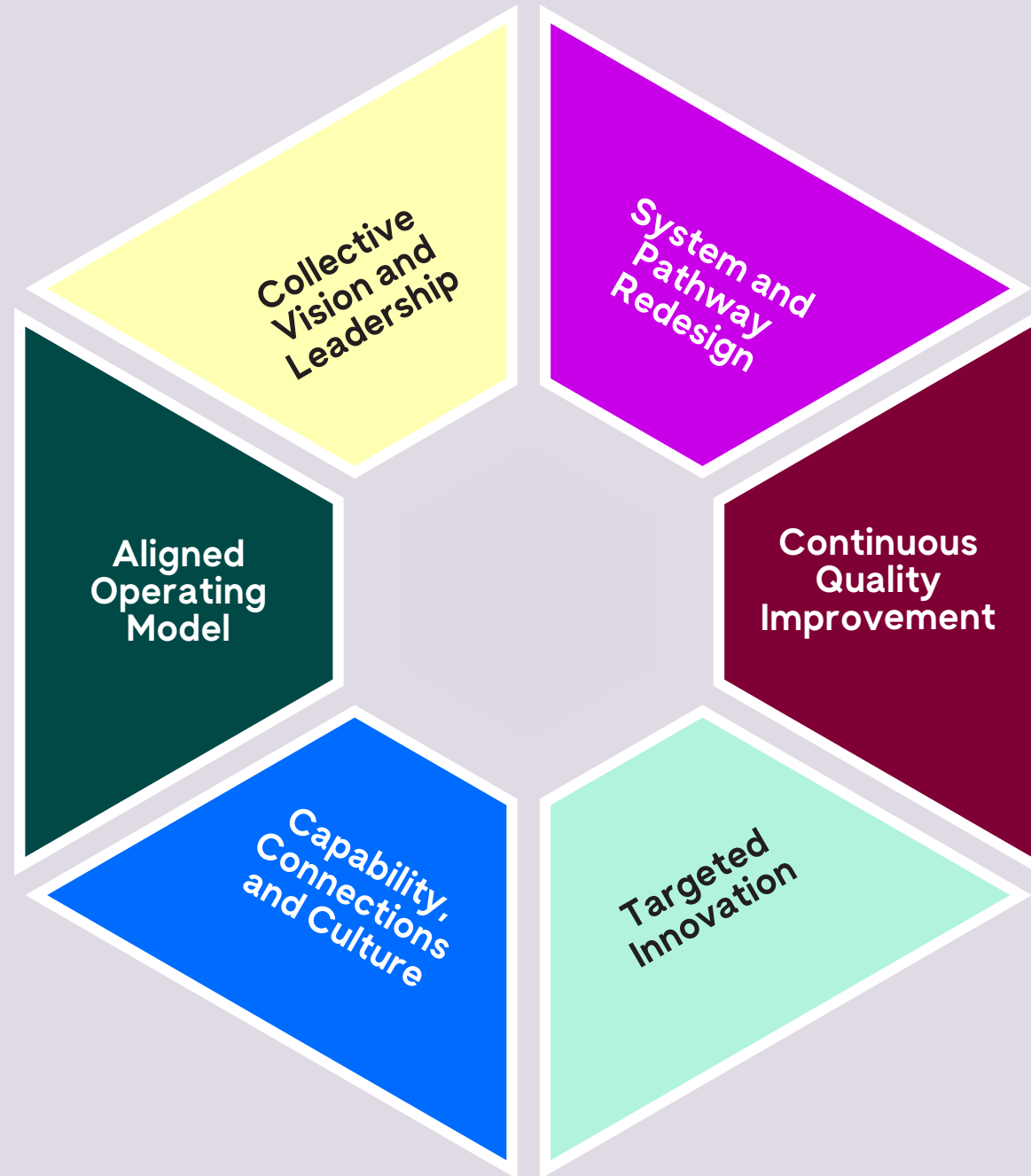
If you are only looking at one domain, you may wish to skip to the action exercise. Otherwise, it's important to reflect on the whole Framework together.





All Domains

Cross-System Improvement Framework



Contents

About the Framework

Cross-System Framework

Who is this for?

Introduction to Framework

Creating the conditions

Delivering transformation

How to use the Framework

Who to involve

Finding a starting point

Questions for Discussion

All Domains

Collective Vision and Leadership

Aligned Operating Model

Capability, Connections, Culture

System and Pathway Redesign

Continuous Quality Improvement

Targeted Innovation

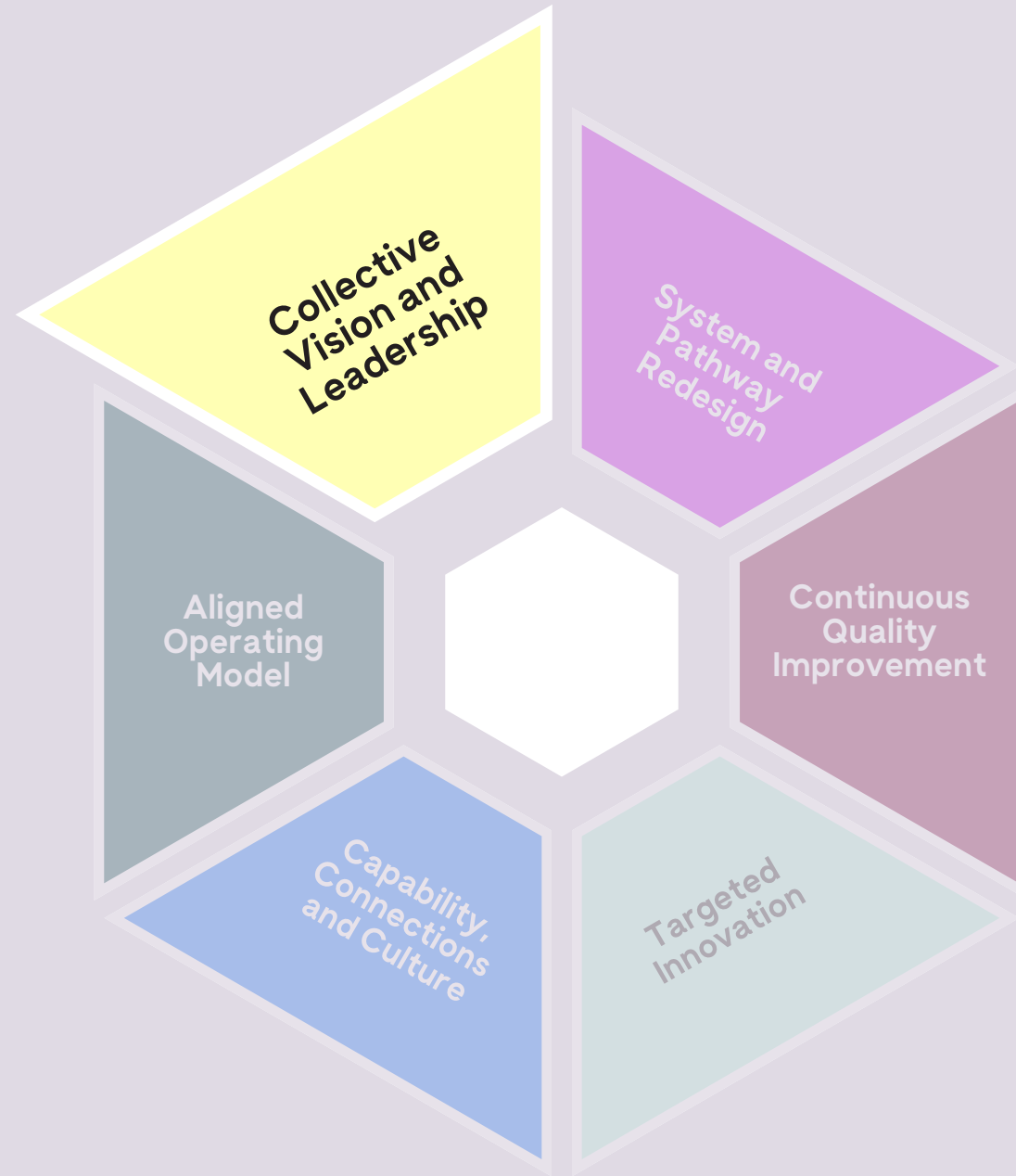
Activities

The Framework in Action



Domain

Collective Vision and Leadership



Contents

About the Framework

Cross-System Framework

Who is this for?

Introduction to Framework

Creating the conditions

Delivering transformation

How to use the Framework

Who to involve

Finding a starting point

Questions for Discussion

All Domains

Collective Vision and Leadership

Aligned Operating Model

Capability, Connections, Culture

System and Pathway Redesign

Continuous Quality Improvement

Targeted Innovation

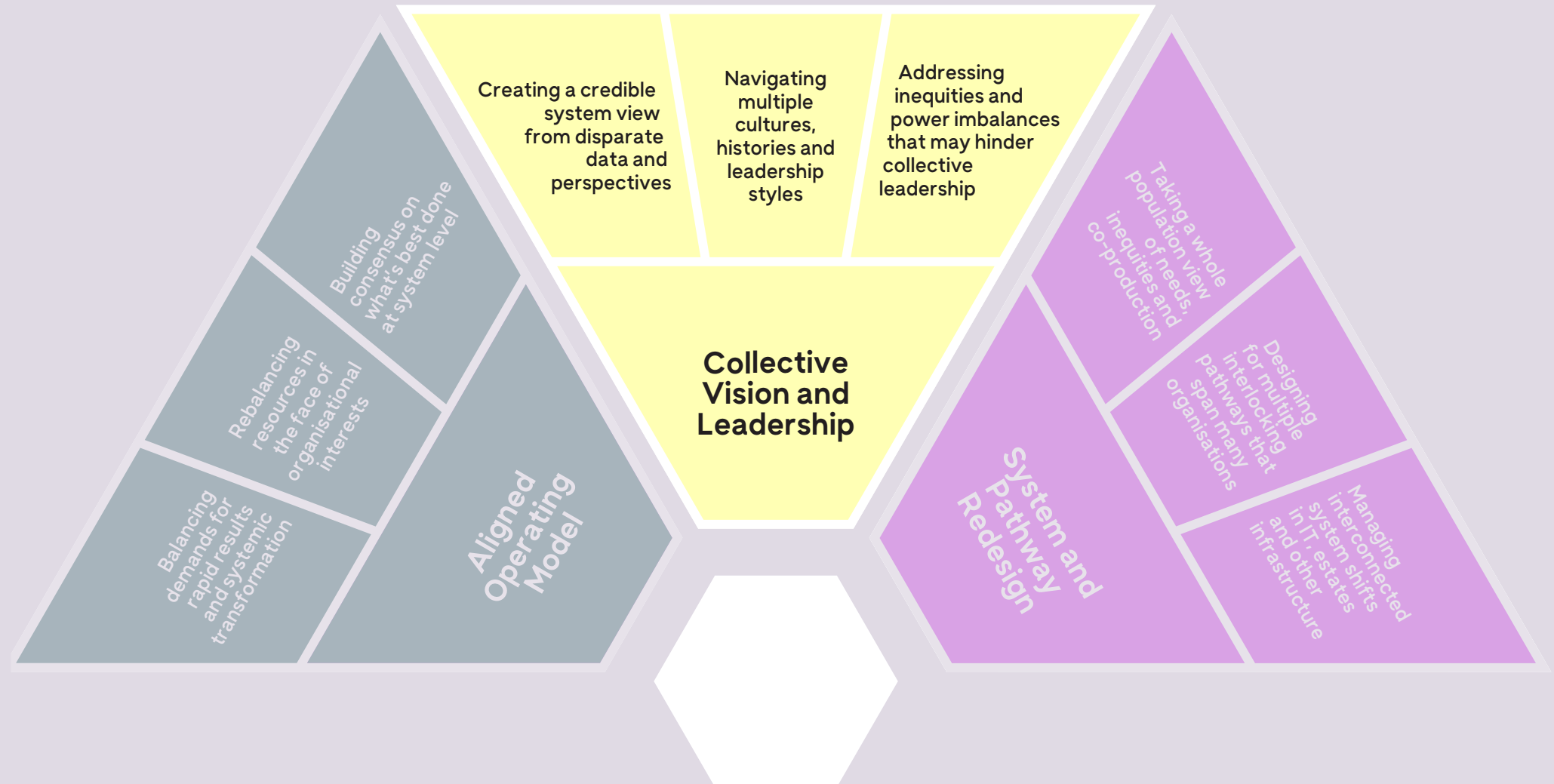
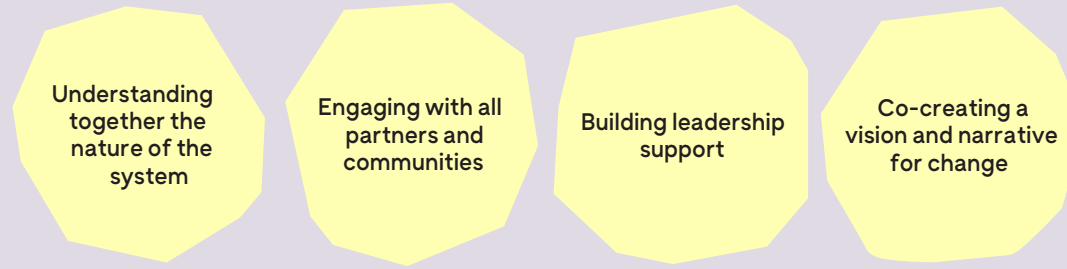
Activities

The Framework in Action



Modes and Activities

Collective Vision and Leadership



Contents

About the Framework

Cross-System Framework

Who is this for?

Introduction to Framework

Creating the conditions

Delivering transformation

How to use the Framework

Who to involve

Finding a starting point

Questions for Discussion

All Domains

Collective Vision and Leadership

Aligned Operating Model

Capability, Connections, Culture

System and Pathway Redesign

Continuous Quality Improvement

Targeted Innovation

Activities

The Framework in Action



Domain

Aligned Operating Model

Contents

About the Framework

Cross-System Framework

Who is this for?

Introduction to Framework

Creating the conditions

Delivering transformation

How to use the Framework

Who to involve

Finding a starting point

Questions for Discussion

All Domains

Collective Vision and Leadership

Aligned Operating Model

Capability, Connections, Culture

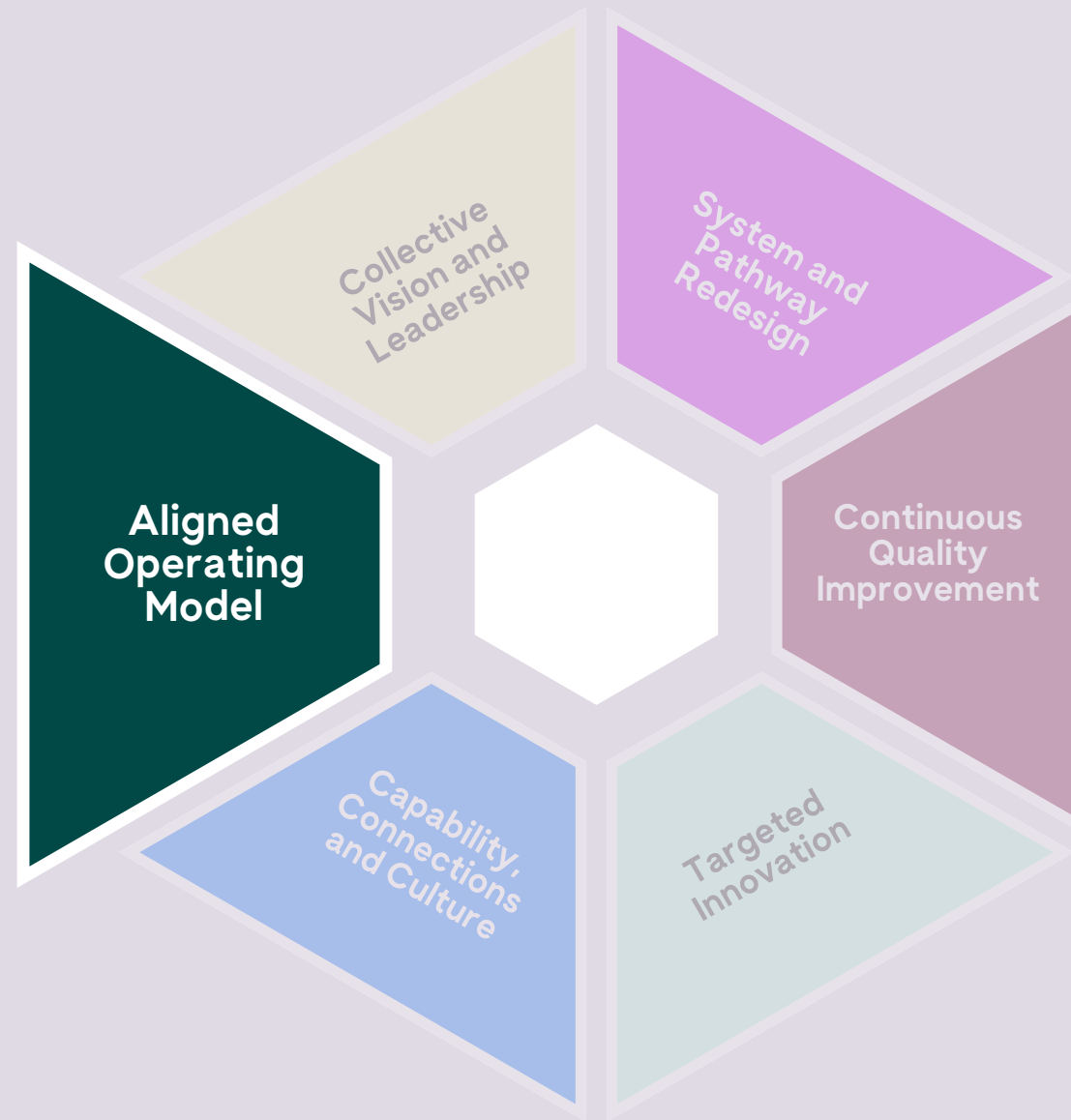
System and Pathway Redesign

Continuous Quality Improvement

Targeted Innovation

Activities

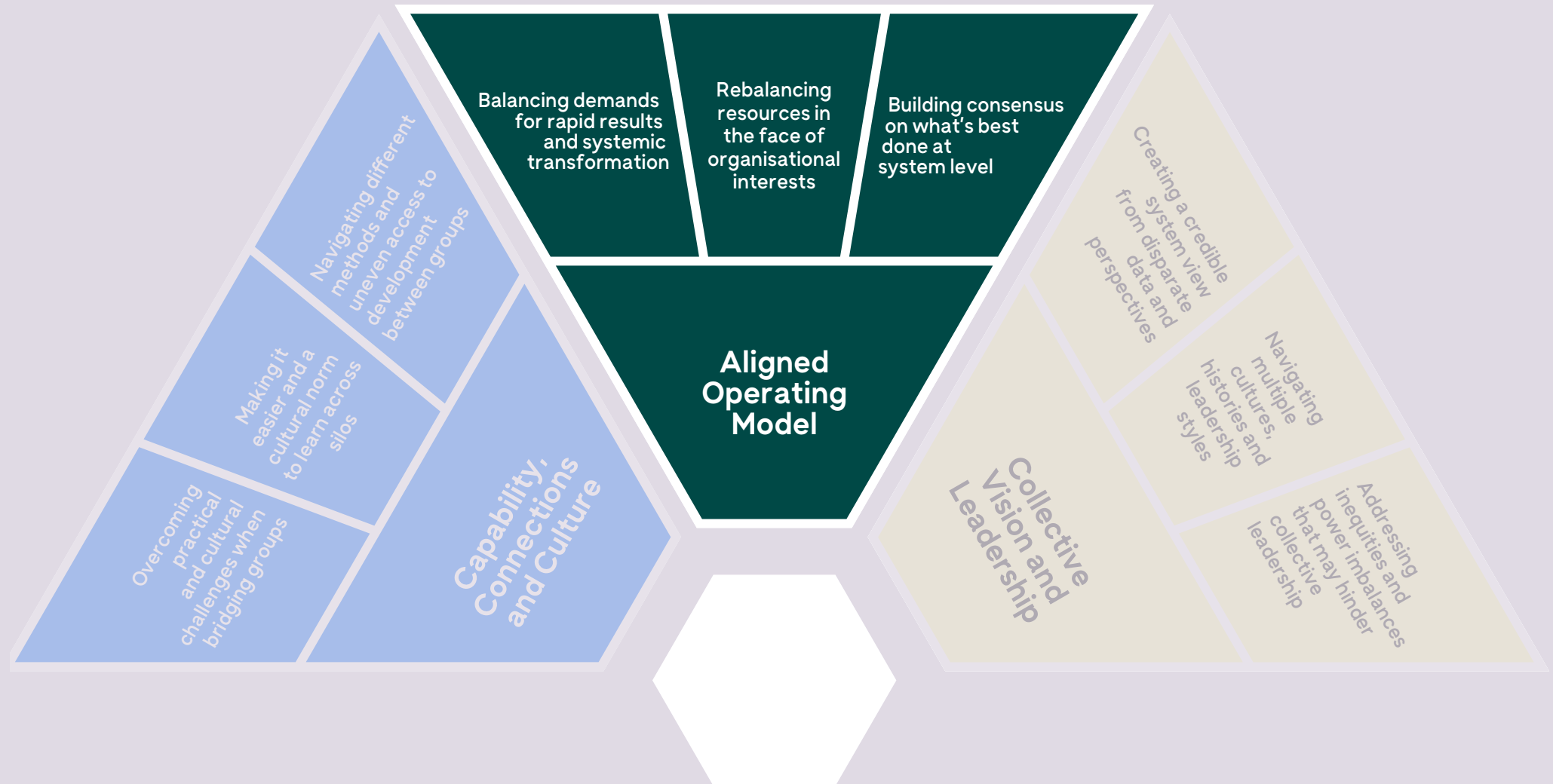
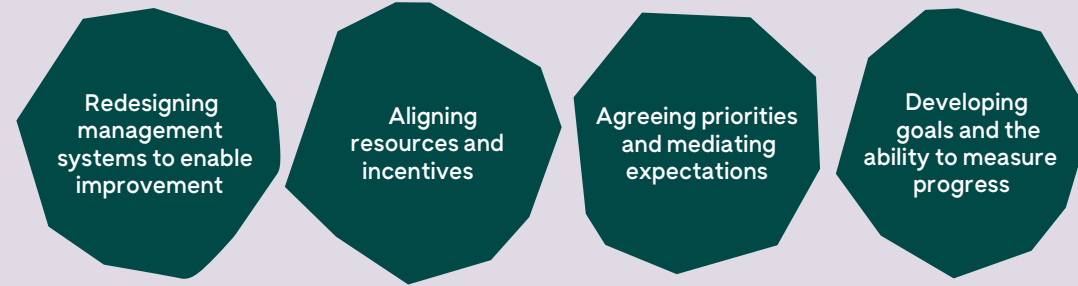
The Framework in Action





Modes and Activities

Aligned Operating Model



Contents

About the Framework

Cross-System Framework

Who is this for?

Introduction to Framework

Creating the conditions

Delivering transformation

How to use the Framework

Who to involve

Finding a starting point

Questions for Discussion

All Domains

Collective Vision and Leadership

Aligned Operating Model

Capability, Connections, Culture

System and Pathway Redesign

Continuous Quality Improvement

Targeted Innovation

Activities

The Framework in Action



Domain

Capability, Connections and Culture

Contents

About the Framework

Cross-System Framework

Who is this for?

Introduction to Framework

Creating the conditions

Delivering transformation

How to use the Framework

Who to involve

Finding a starting point

Questions for Discussion

All Domains

Collective Vision and Leadership

Aligned Operating Model

Capability, Connections, Culture

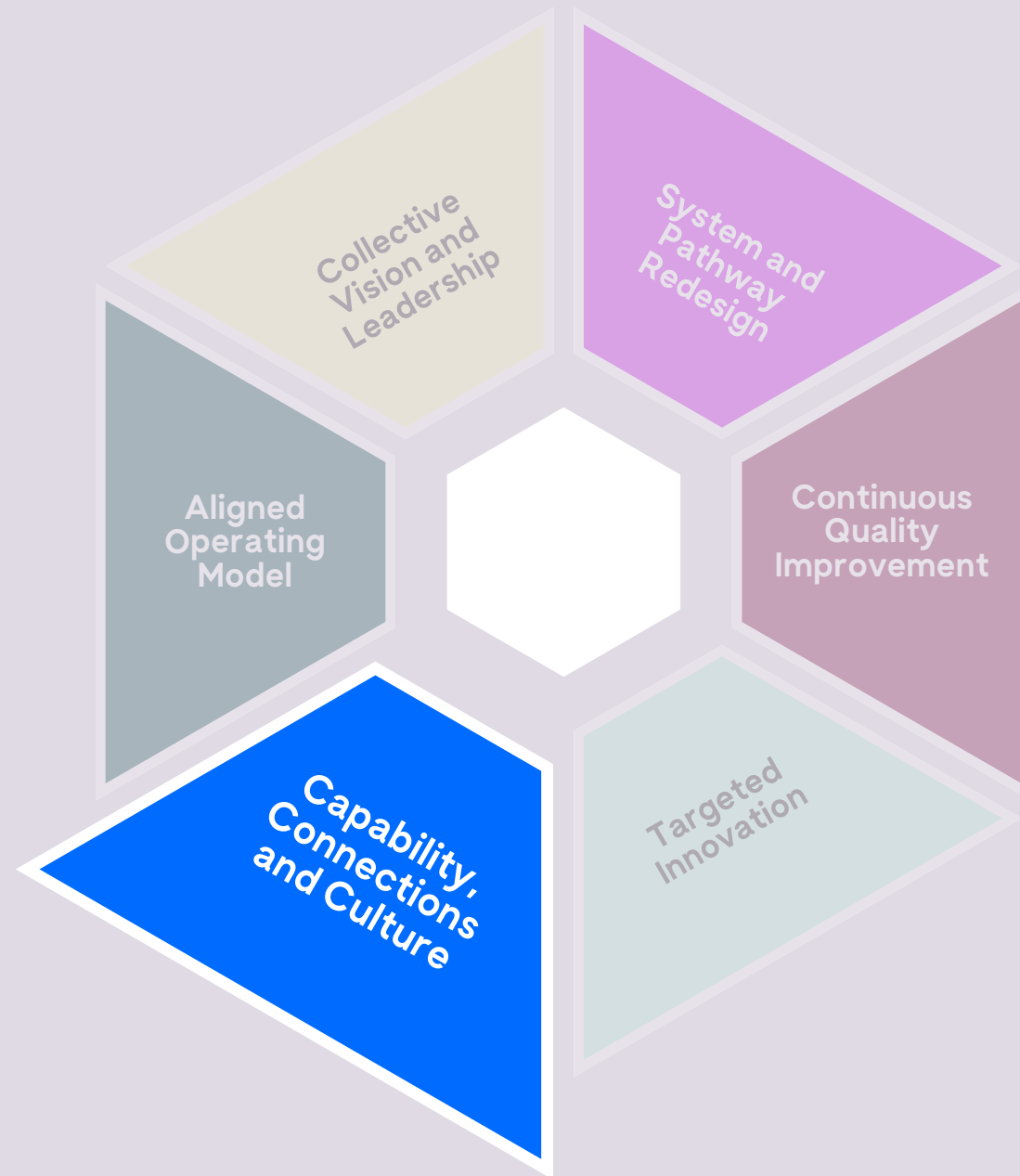
System and Pathway Redesign

Continuous Quality Improvement

Targeted Innovation

Activities

The Framework in Action





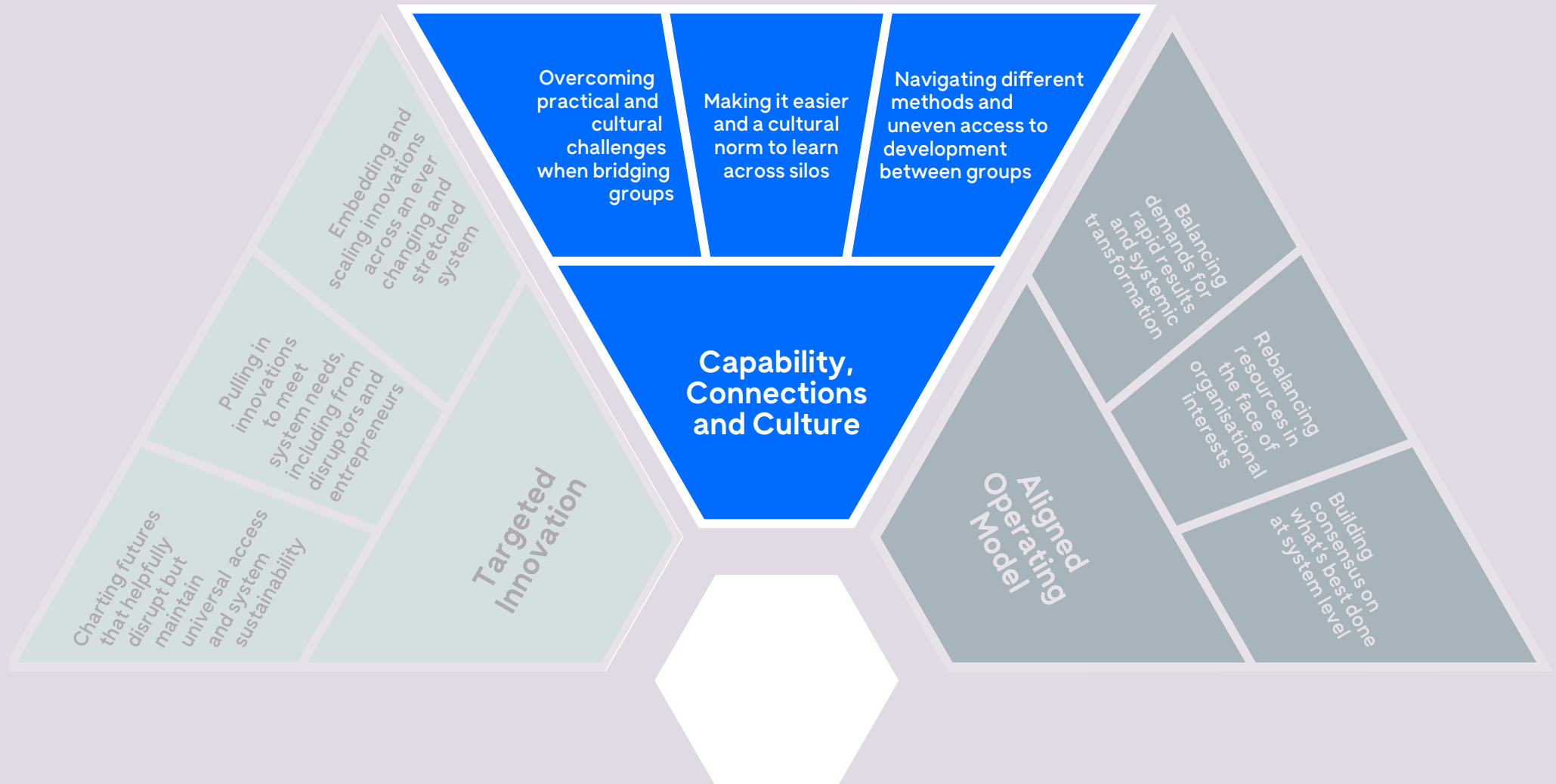
Modes and Activities

Capability, Connections and Culture

Enabling productive cross-silo connections and reflection

Creating collaborative learning habits and structures

Building skills and space for everyone involved in the change



Contents

About the Framework

Cross-System Framework

Who is this for?

Introduction to Framework

Creating the conditions

Delivering transformation

How to use the Framework

Who to involve

Finding a starting point

Questions for Discussion

All Domains

Collective Vision and Leadership

Aligned Operating Model

Capability, Connections, Culture

System and Pathway Redesign

Continuous Quality Improvement

Targeted Innovation

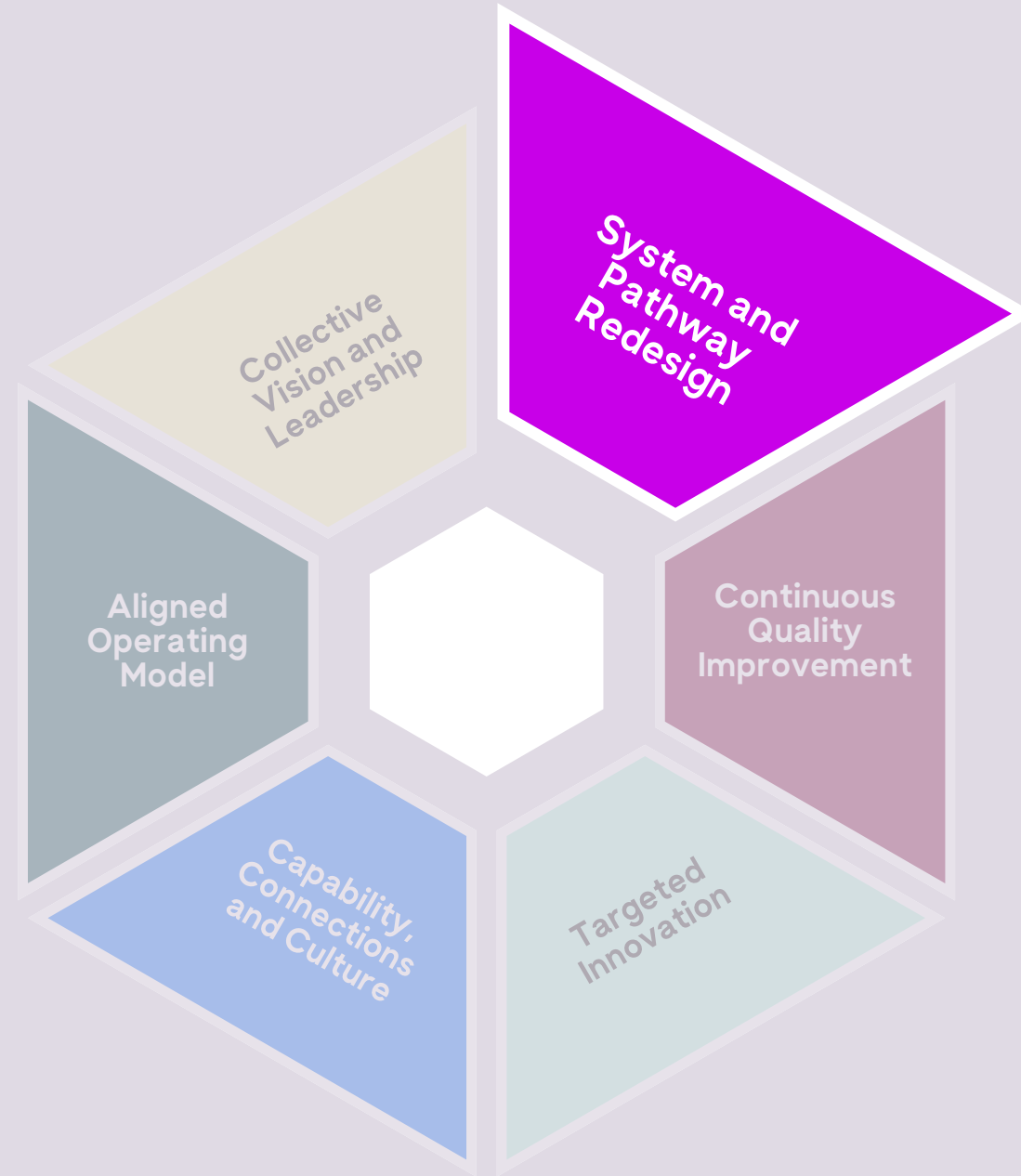
Activities

The Framework in Action



Domain

System and Pathway Redesign



Contents

About the Framework

Cross-System Framework

Who is this for?

Introduction to Framework

Creating the conditions

Delivering transformation

How to use the Framework

Who to involve

Finding a starting point

Questions for Discussion

All Domains

Collective Vision and Leadership

Aligned Operating Model

Capability, Connections, Culture

System and Pathway Redesign

Continuous Quality Improvement

Targeted Innovation

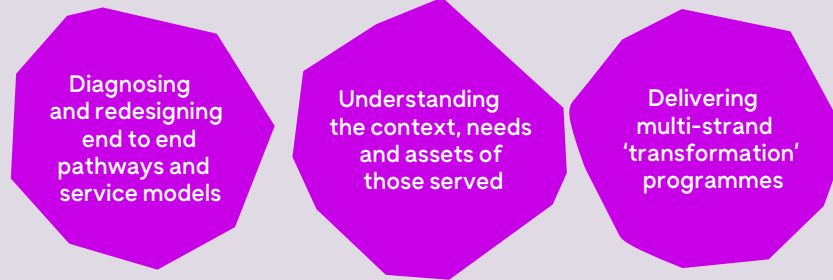
Activities

The Framework in Action

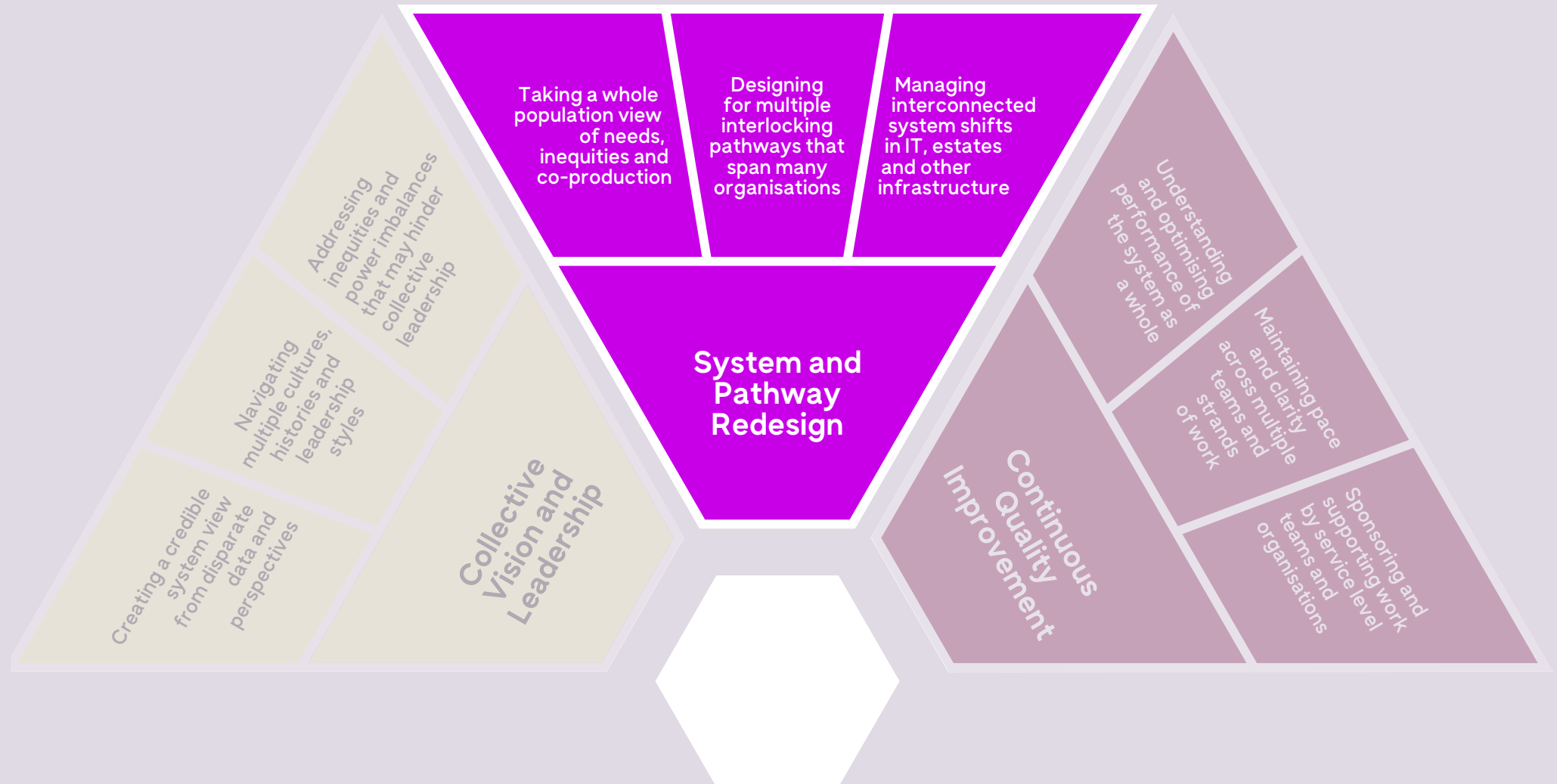


Modes and Activities

System and Pathway Redesign



- Contents
- About the Framework
- Cross-System Framework
- Who is this for?
- Introduction to Framework
- Creating the conditions
- Delivering transformation
- How to use the Framework
- Who to involve
- Finding a starting point
- Questions for Discussion
- All Domains
- Collective Vision and Leadership**
- Aligned Operating Model**
- Capability, Connections, Culture**
- System and Pathway Redesign**
- Continuous Quality Improvement**
- Targeted Innovation**
- Activities
- The Framework in Action





Domain

Continuous Quality Improvement

Contents

About the Framework

Cross-System Framework

Who is this for?

Introduction to Framework

Creating the conditions

Delivering transformation

How to use the Framework

Who to involve

Finding a starting point

Questions for Discussion

All Domains

Collective Vision and Leadership

Aligned Operating Model

Capability, Connections, Culture

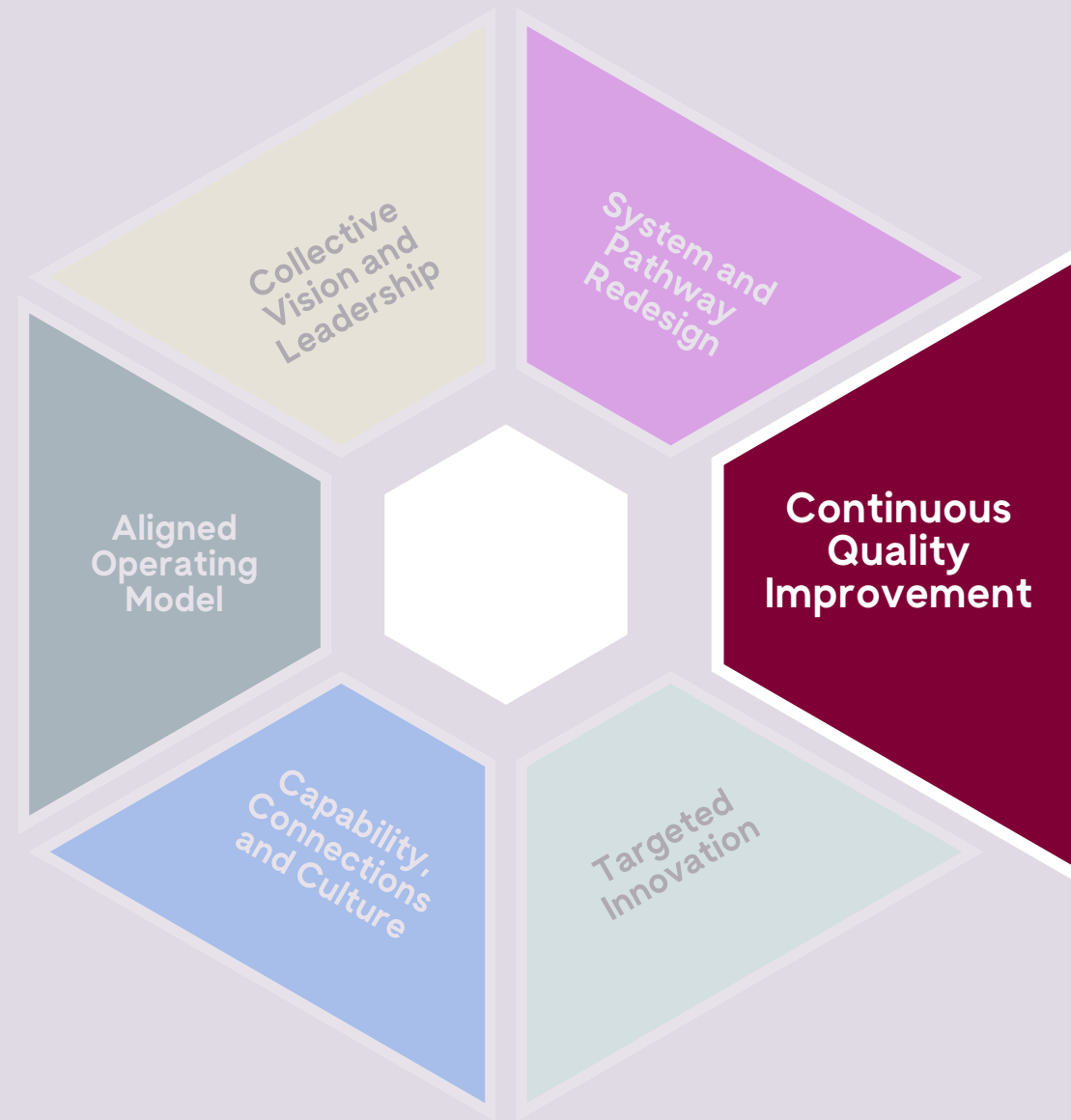
System and Pathway Redesign

Continuous Quality Improvement

Targeted Innovation

Activities

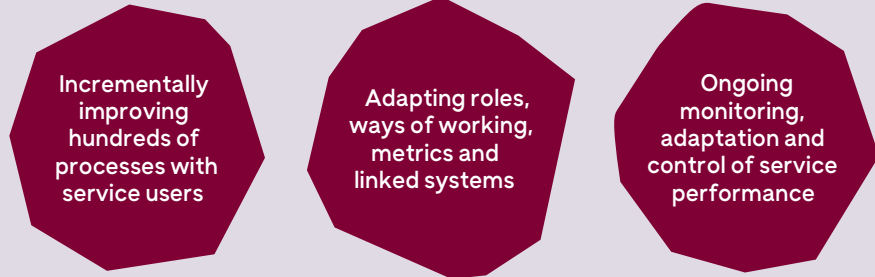
The Framework in Action



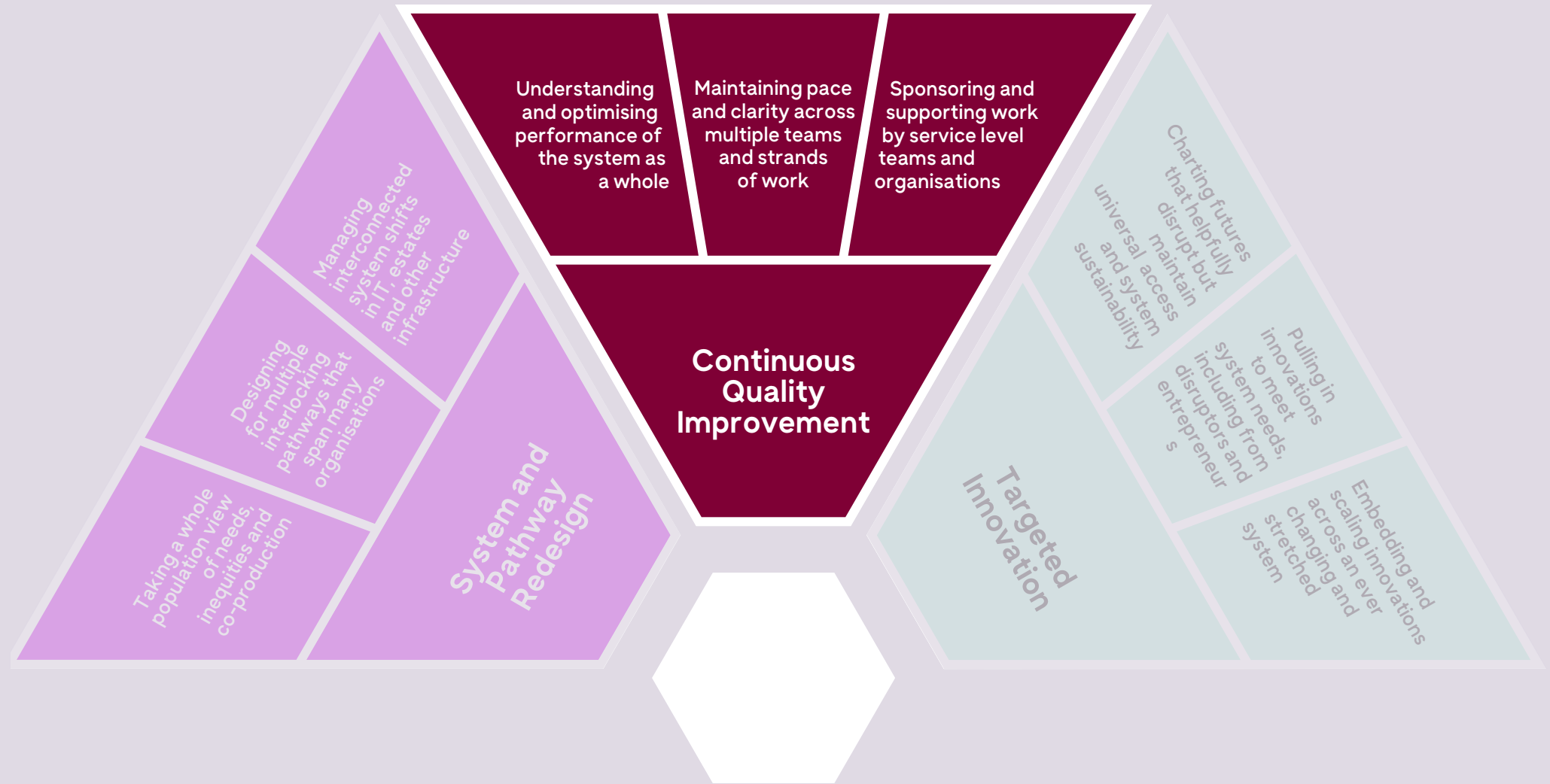


Modes and Activities

Continuous Quality Improvement



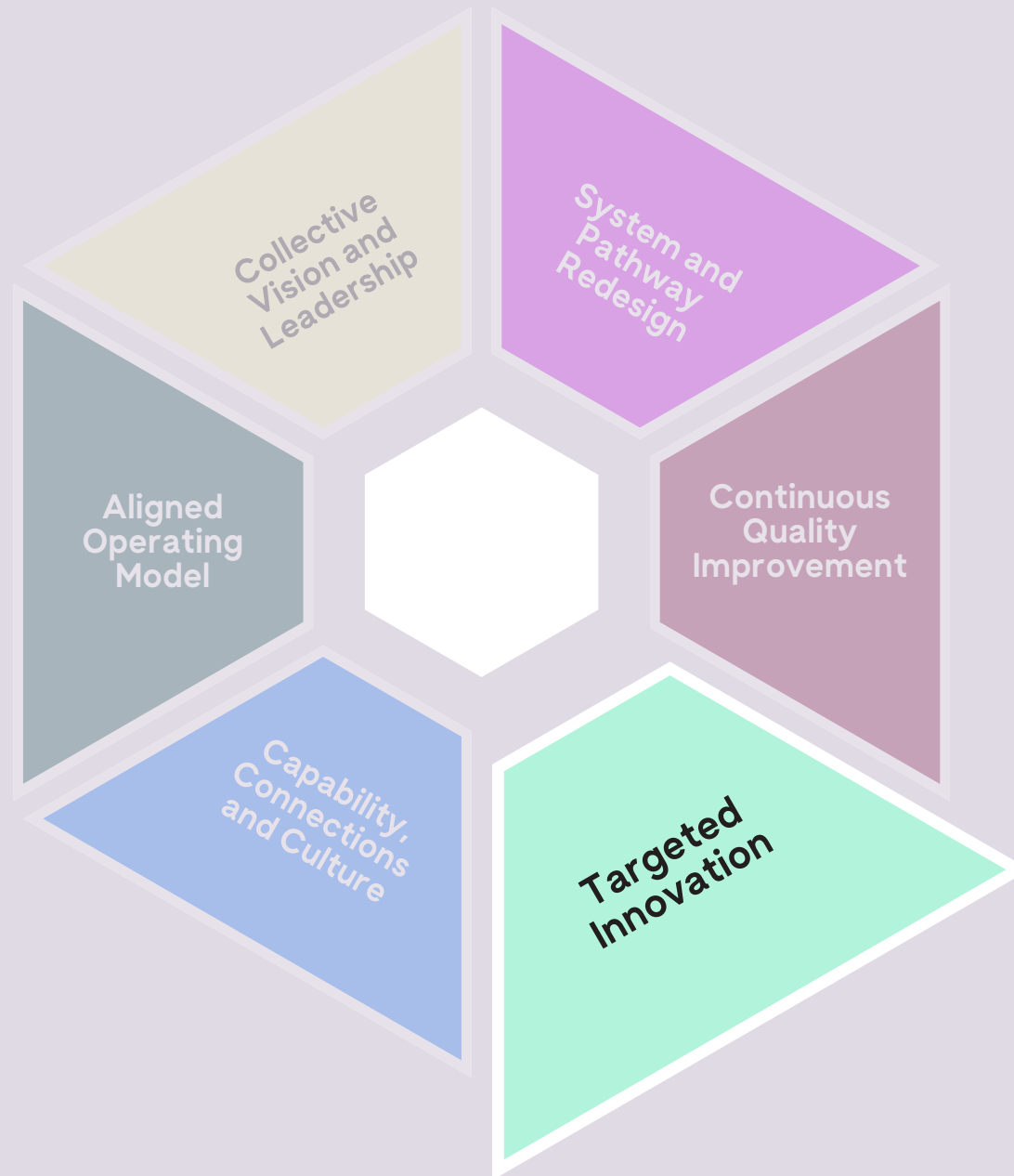
- Contents
- About the Framework
- Cross-System Framework
- Who is this for?
- Introduction to Framework
- Creating the conditions
- Delivering transformation
- How to use the Framework
- Who to involve
- Finding a starting point
- Questions for Discussion
- All Domains
- Collective Vision and Leadership
- Aligned Operating Model
- Capability, Connections, Culture
- System and Pathway Redesign
- Continuous Quality Improvement
- Targeted Innovation
- Activities
- The Framework in Action





Domain

Targeted Innovation



Contents

About the Framework

Cross-System Framework

Who is this for?

Introduction to Framework

Creating the conditions

Delivering transformation

How to use the Framework

Who to involve

Finding a starting point

Questions for Discussion

All Domains

Collective Vision and Leadership

Aligned Operating Model

Capability, Connections, Culture

System and Pathway Redesign

Continuous Quality Improvement

Targeted Innovation

Activities

The Framework in Action



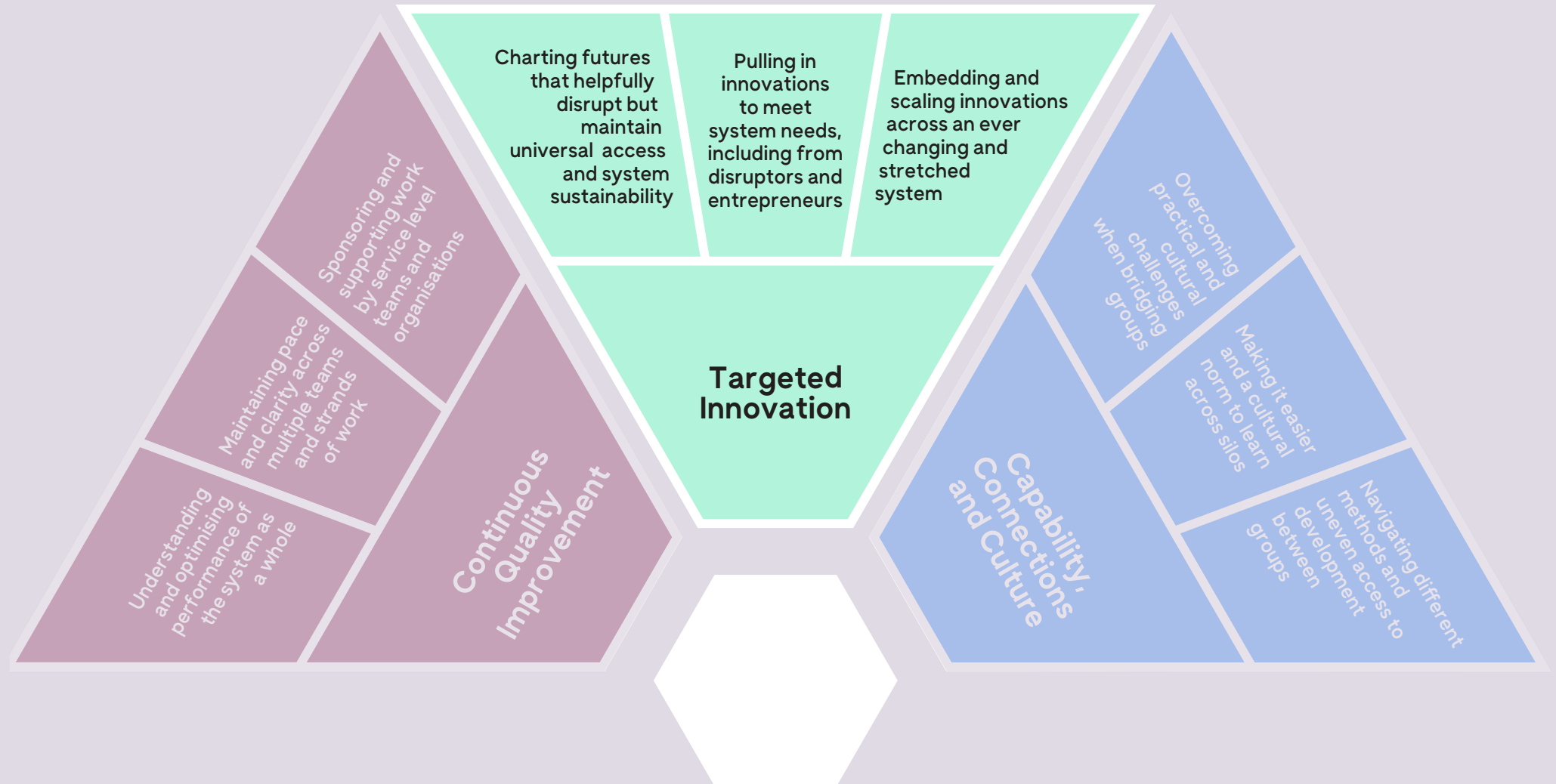
Modes and Activities

Targeted Innovation

Understanding the current situation and desired futures

Identifying priority gaps and / or innovations

Testing, experimenting, scaling and embedding innovations



Contents

About the Framework

Cross-System Framework

Who is this for?

Introduction to Framework

Creating the conditions

Delivering transformation

How to use the Framework

Who to involve

Finding a starting point

Questions for Discussion

All Domains

Collective Vision and Leadership

Aligned Operating Model

Capability, Connections, Culture

System and Pathway Redesign

Continuous Quality Improvement

Targeted Innovation

Activities

The Framework in Action



Creating balance across the domains

Contents

About the Framework

Cross-System Framework

Who is this for?

Introduction to Framework

Creating the conditions

Delivering transformation

How to use the Framework

Who to involve

Finding a starting point

Questions for Discussion

All Domains

Collective Vision and Leadership

Aligned Operating Model

Capability, Connections, Culture

System and Pathway Redesign

Continuous Quality Improvement

Targeted Innovation

Activities

The Framework in Action

Objective: To start to uncover activity and patterns to create a shared understanding of what's happening across different domains.

This discussion should support you to a shared deeper understanding of your activity, underlying dynamics and patterns. You should explore what is taking place within your system, focus on relevant activity and build your version of the Framework specific to your system.

Collective Vision and Leadership	Aligned Operating Model	Capabilities, Connections and Culture	You might expect to get...
Yes	X	X	An inspiring vision without the ability and skill to deliver: loss of momentum; cynicism and low morale.
X	Yes	X	Processes that tick the boxes but lack buy in. Bureaucracy and disengagement.
X	X	Yes	People with energy and skills, frustrated by lack of support and scope for change. Small scale or short lived projects.





Contents

About the Framework

Cross-System Framework

Who is this for?

Introduction to Framework

Creating the conditions

Delivering transformation

How to use the Framework

Who to involve

Finding a starting point

Questions for Discussion

All Domains

Collective Vision and Leadership

Aligned Operating Model

Capability, Connections, Culture

System and Pathway Redesign

Continuous Quality Improvement

Targeted Innovation

Activities

The Framework in Action

System and pathway redesign	Continuous quality improvement	Targeted innovation	You might expect to get...
Yes	X	X	Ambitious plans for shifting models of care that fail to work in practice. Limited benefits realised.
X	Yes	X	Incremental improvements that help maintain the current model of care. Limited scaling or bigger benefits.
X	X	Yes	Individual tech or other solutions that may not embed well or meet the priorities for the health system. Wasted resource and potential.





Exercise: Understanding your collective activity

Contents

About the Framework

Cross-System Framework

Who is this for?

Introduction to Framework

Creating the conditions

Delivering transformation

How to use the Framework

Who to involve

Finding a starting point

Questions for Discussion

All Domains

Collective Vision and Leadership

Aligned Operating Model

Capability, Connections, Culture

System and Pathway Redesign

Continuous Quality Improvement

Targeted Innovation

Activities

The Framework in Action

Now you've explored activity across the different domains, playback a summary from each domain to the room. You may wish to record what's happening on the Framework itself to provide a visual across the different domains for people to engage with during the following discussion.

This exercise is aimed at creating a collective view of your current system and how things are currently working by identifying your assets and what needs further exploration.

Question prompts:

- What does this tell you about where you are putting your energy at organisational and system level?
- What does your activity suggest about the role you play as a system?
- Are there any activities you need to add or any activities that aren't relevant to you?
- What does the balance feel like across the domains? Refer to the table.
- What are your biggest assets? What do you want to build on?
- Where do you feel you are wasting energy?
- What domains do you need more clarity on or have unanswered questions about?





Exercise: Moving to action

Contents

About the Framework

Cross-System Framework

Who is this for?

Introduction to Framework

Creating the conditions

Delivering transformation

How to use the Framework

Who to involve

Finding a starting point

Questions for Discussion

All Domains

Collective Vision and Leadership

Aligned Operating Model

Capability, Connections, Culture

System and Pathway Redesign

Continuous Quality Improvement

Targeted Innovation

Activities

The Framework in Action

Objective: This exercise supports you to identify areas to take forward concrete action from your conversations.

Now you've been through the Framework and identified activity and assets you want to build on. We are going to surface patterns and themes across the domains and discuss changes you want to implement.

Exercise: What requires a system-wide response? Recap the work you've done so far and reflect as a group on:

- What patterns and themes are you seeing?
- Where are you creating value? (Think about your assets that you want to build on)
- What activity can you let go of? The scope and focus depends on where you have control and influence and how much resource you can commit.
- Individually ask people to reflect on which themes are in your control and require a collective response.
- What 2-3 opportunities should you prioritise as a group? (you may want to do this using a 1-2-4-all exercise).

Whether you've looked at one part of the system or explored all six domains, you will likely need to continue developing your ideas together and involve other people as you go.

You should think about how you're going to take this forward, considering these questions:

- How will you share this output with others?
- Who else do you need to bring in?
- You may want to do the optional exercise on creating a narrative.





Optional exercise: Creating shared narrative

Contents

About the Framework

Cross-System Framework

Who is this for?

Introduction to Framework

Creating the conditions

Delivering transformation

How to use the Framework

Who to involve

Finding a starting point

Questions for Discussion

All Domains

Collective Vision and Leadership

Aligned Operating Model

Capability, Connections, Culture

System and Pathway Redesign

Continuous Quality Improvement

Targeted Innovation

Activities

The Framework in Action

Objective: This exercise helps you define and find the space for change.

Through your conversations so far, you may already be thinking about how to make the case for a system-wide improvement approach. This is an optional group exercise to support you to develop a narrative for change to help you influence and embed actions you've identified through this work.

Motivation:

- What is motivating you in this change and what is your authority?
- What type of system are you working in and who do you need to involve?

Current landscape:

- What are your current beliefs and values about change?
- What are the current principles and narratives that need to change?
- Where will there be resistance?
- How will you cope with this?

What needs to change?

- What needs changing to get there? Eg processes, behaviours, information flows, relationships.
- Describe what is going to look and feel different.
- What is the new shared mission?

Building community:

- How can you describe the change to people affected by it?
- What's the story?
- Who can help you?
- What is the new shared mission?





Contents

About the Framework

Cross-System Framework

Who is this for?

Introduction to Framework

Creating the conditions

Delivering transformation

How to use the Framework

Who to involve

Finding a starting point

Questions for Discussion

All Domains

Collective Vision and Leadership

Aligned Operating Model

Capability, Connections, Culture

System and Pathway Redesign

Continous Quality Improvement

Targeted Innovation

Activities

The Framework in Action

The Framework in action

As you start to use the Framework in practice, we encourage you to share your experiences of using it with us, so we can continue to build the evidence base about change across large systems. We want to share more tools to support those working at this level to deliver the system transformation to improve health and care for your populations and communities.

Contact us to share your experiences: q@thenhsalliance.org

Further reading

- [Supporting system improvement: lessons from a peer learning programme](#)
- [System Improvement Support – Helping you to tackle system-wide challenges with confidence](#)
- [Five principles for supporting peer learning for system improvement](#)
- [Improving health and care at scale.](#)

Q is hosted by the NHS Alliance and supported by the Health Foundation and partners across the UK and Ireland.

Get in touch with us for feedback or to ask about our support services: q@thenhsalliance.org
Or visit: q.thenhsalliance.org

© May 2026

The Cross-System Improvement Framework © 2026 by Q is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. To view a copy of this license, visit creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

