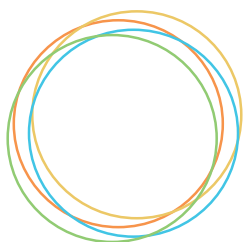




# The Infinity Loop Impact Model

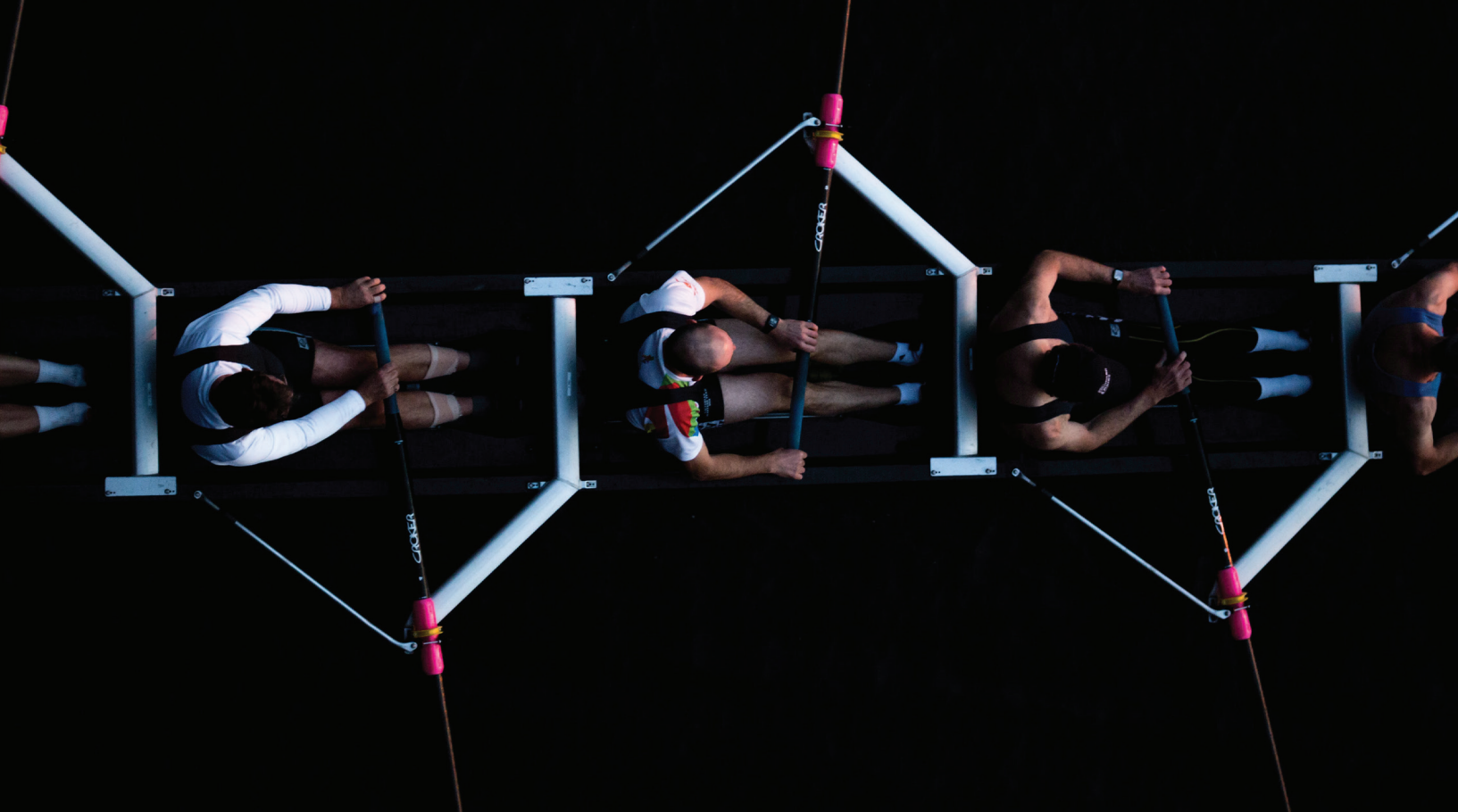
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*Thinkpiece #1*



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## Challenges

Given the challenges that communities, institutions, and our planet now face, we only work with organizations with transformational change goals, keying on those with robust health, social justice, and environmental objectives.

Our unique organizational development (OD) services increase the effectiveness and impact of such purpose-based organizations. Here we describe the overarching model of organizational behaviour and performance that Engage For 2030 uses to greatly improve and increase impact.

Whether they are a non-profit society, a university, a school board, a health authority, a for-profit company, a faith-based group, a community association, or a unit of government, a strongly purpose-based organization attracts committed people with powerful values and skills. A clear commitment to making positive change is a major attractor and retainer for talented staff and volunteers, as well as a guiding star for everyone involved.

However, such groups must achieve their ambitious goals in a world with many competing interests, where resources are seen as limited, where competition can be fierce, and where some beliefs and behaviours are not easily shifted. That world is also increasingly smaller, more pluralistic, more contested, more uncertain, and subject to rapid change.

To succeed, purposeful organizations must be highly strategic, focused, and nimble. They also continuously draw all their available resources into alignment, efficiently delivering valuable programs, products, and services while keeping a close eye on external conditions and trends. Not easy to do while also tracking their external impact over time, adjusting as needed.

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*While many groups have formal mission statements, it has often been our good fortune to work with organizations actively seeking outcomes well beyond the “bottom line”.*

## Infinity Loop Model

Fortunately, there is a transformative ongoing practice that purpose-based organizations can adopt to help them thrive in the face of these challenges. It starts with a set of internally focused capacity-building activities grounded in an agreed purpose.

The internal work we do together engages, strengthens, and aligns the organization’s staff, leadership, programs, and funding. The externally focused work ensures a strong understanding of external conditions and trends, and (critically) taps into additional collaborators and resources. Together, these two linked sets of activities greatly strengthen purpose-based organizational performance and impact.



We call this practice the **Infinity Loop Impact Model** because of its ongoing nature, and because one part of the infinity loop symbolizes internal engagement while the other reflects external engagement. Engagement is the right term because you are drawing from all parts of the organization and from the larger system the organization inhabits. The ongoing use of strategic and courageous conversations builds a truly collaborative and impact-oriented culture with a wide range of benefits.

To harvest the rewards of increased collaboration, **working purposefully and in alignment** become part of individual, team, division and organizational culture and practice. Other Engage For 2030 thinkpieces describe key practices, benefits, considerations, techniques, and resources. Here we introduce the eight “organizational levels” to focus on, and the key capacities needed for internal and external engagement. **The internal side of the infinity loop includes four levels:** the individual, the team, the division, and the organization (led by the executive). The individual needs to feel connected to the larger mission, to feel part of a respected team, and to be empowered to excel in their areas of responsibility. Teams need a clear definition of their role and function, but also a mutually supportive culture and a sense of the larger whole. Divisions need to influence and be tied into strategy, with leaders who align efforts and outcomes across the organization. Senior leadership must discuss the whole system, connecting and communicating what they are seeing both externally and internally.

The internal work also requires a **culture and practice of constructive reflection and discussion** about the mission, goals, activities, strategies, tools, and skills of the organization. Encouraging people across the organization to continuously talk, think and act as leaders in their areas of focus supports adaptive management, and improves implementation. When this culture and these practices are in place internally, the organization begins to function as a **true learning organization**, using focused and relationship-building conversations to ensure alignment on an ongoing basis.

At this point, the organization can engage externally to connect with resources, perspective and capacity that would otherwise not be available, and which support progress on the mission. Core tasks are building trusting and mutually beneficial relationships, sharing perspectives and information, and aligning resources, strategic initiatives, and activities.



Change model of the Special Olympics Global Inclusive Health strategy.

**The four external levels** at which an organization does this kind of work are: partners, affiliated networks, the public, and larger (global) systems. **Partners** are closely aligned groups that share your vision for the future and are willing and able to form close, practical working relationships. **Networks** bring together a larger and broader set of people and organizations with shared goals and overlapping skills and assets. **The public** can be tapped for support, but can also help “move the needle” on critical issues by forming coalitions. Finally, the **practice of systems** leadership focuses on creating the conditions for self-sustaining change in the world.

While it may seem daunting to focus on eight different levels in an ongoing pattern, the benefits of this transformative practice are many, and the multiplier effect achieved is truly transformative. Using the Infinity Loop Impact Model to increase your organization’s focus, alignment, and impact is our purpose and passion.

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