Q Improvement Lab

Skills for collaborative change

A skills map and user guide

Led by

The Health Foundation

In partnership with

nesta
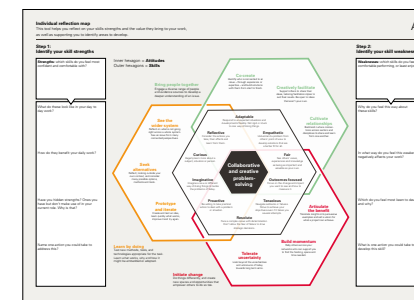
Contents

Guide contents

This booklet guides you through a number of team and individual exercises, which are supported by the following resources:

User guide

Skills map poster

Individual reflection map
(worksheet at A3 and A1 size)

Set of skills cards

This guide and all the resources are available to download at
q.health.org.uk/skills-for-collaborative-change

Collaborative change: a skills map and user guide

Background

In 2015 the Health Foundation and NHS Improvement established the Q initiative – a diverse community that has grown to thousands of people who are working to improve health and care throughout the UK. In 2017 the Q Improvement Lab launched, providing opportunities for people to come together and focus on specific complex challenges facing the health and care system.

The underpinning focus of this ambitious initiative is to enable health care professionals and patients to connect and collaborate, support each other and develop skills and new approaches to drive improvement in care. Through our experience of delivering Q and the Q Lab, and supported by research, it has become clear that the skills needed to collaborate and tackle problems are wide-ranging and often under-invested in. A report by NHS Employers[1] in 2017 identified that a 'bias towards developing functional expertise leaves companies lacking collaborative capability' and that 'power-based structures and cultures lack the attitudes or skills to collaborate well cross-boundary'.

Our experience also demonstrates the tremendous will and commitment from practitioners and patients to collaboratively tackling health care challenges, and a recognition that although this approach is not the quickest way to solve problems, it is often the way to achieve sustainable improvement.

There is more to be done to support people to develop and nurture the skills and attitudes that enable collaboration. We believe this skills map and user guide can help people to have better conversations and take action to improve the abilities of teams and organisations to solve problems in collaborative and creative ways.

How we developed the skills map

The Q Lab worked in partnership with Nesta to develop the skills map and user guide which highlights the skills and attitudes required for collaborative and creative problem-solving. It builds on:

- Nesta's work with leading innovation practitioners from around the world to define the key skills, attitudes and behaviours that public sector innovators use to solve public problems.[2]
- Research with improvement experts, including building on the Health Foundation's *Habits of an Improver*.[3]
- Practical learning from Q and the Health Foundation's work supporting health care professionals and patients to deliver change.

Our intention is to create an accessible and practical tool for individuals and teams to have conversations about their own skills and attitudes, shining a light on the unique contribution of bringing people together and creating the right conditions for change.

The map does not seek to answer how you develop the specific skills listed, nor does it cover every skill that may be required in different contexts. Its purpose is to identify skills and attitudes that have been shown to be important based on research and practice, and to encourage you to think through the importance of these skills in your work and the blend that may be required across teams and organisations. This work is not an exact science, but rather a guide and provocation for action.

About the Q Improvement Lab

The Q Lab is part of Q and is delivered by the Health Foundation and supported by NHS England and NHS Improvement. We bring together individuals and organisations from Q and beyond to make progress on shared health and care challenges.

The Q Lab uses approaches from quality improvement and disciplines such as social innovation and design. A core feature of the Q Lab is our highly collaborative and participatory process. We use a range of methods and support people to work across boundaries – harnessing their collective energy and skills around impactful ideas – to creatively make progress on complex problems together.

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[1] University of Bath. *Trustworthy Collaboration: Building trust across health systems.* NHS Employers, 2017 (https://www.nhsemployers.org/case-studies-and-resources/2017/06/trustworthy-collaboration-report)

[2] Nesta. *What are the skills and attitudes for successful public problem solving?* Nesta, 2016 (https://www.nesta.org.uk/blog/what-are-skills-and-attitudes-successful-public-problem-solving/)

[3] Lucas B, Nacer H. *Habits of an Improver*, The Health Foundation, 2015 (https://www.health.org.uk/publications/the-habits-of-an-improver).

The skills map

The skills map visualises the skills and attitudes underpinning collaborative and creative problem-solving.

Attitudes

The central hexagon identifies the key attitudes that foster creative and collaborative problem-solving. Attitudes can change but are deeply ingrained so they don't change easily or quickly. It takes a significant amount of time (we're talking years, not months or weeks) to develop certain attitudes.

Skill areas

The surrounding hexagons identify three skill areas that are core to collaborative and creative problem-solving:

- Bring people together
- Learn by doing
- Initiate change

Three specific skills sit within each area. Skills are easier to learn and develop than attitudes.

How to use it

This is a tool for reflection and empowerment, not evaluation. It's designed to support you, your team or your organisation to consider the skills and attitudes that apply regularly in your work and those that might need developing.

There isn't a single way to use it, but it works best when a team uses it together because empowered and well-balanced teams are where change happens. However, you can also use it as an individual tool for personal reflection.

Page eight onwards sets out several examples and exercises to guide you on how best to use it.

Even when people come together with the same aims, being able to work together well isn't a given. In order to work well, people need to be able to reflect on their relationships, skills and ways of working to build trust with others. Identifying your own skills and openly discussing them might feel difficult, so you'll need to consider how to embed psychological safety as you start to explore this work with others. For example, if you are bringing a group together for the first time, you may want to start with individual exploration of what these skills mean before jumping into mapping the team as a whole.

Inner hexagon = **Attitudes**
Outer hexagons = **Skills**

Co-create
Identify who is connected to an issue – through experience or expertise – and build solutions with them from start to finish.

Bring people together
Engage a diverse range of people and evidence sources to develop a deeper understanding of an issue.

Creatively facilitate
Support others to share their ideas, tailoring facilitation styles to suit their needs. Be open to ideas that aren't your own.

See the wider system
Reflect on what is not going right across a whole system. See an issue from many connected perspectives.

Cultivate relationships
Build and nurture connections across sectors and disciplines to share and learn from one another.

Adaptable
Respond to unexpected situations and developments flexibly. Not rigid or stuck to one way of doing things.

Reflective
Consider the actions you take, their effects and learn from them.

Empathetic
Understand a problem from others' point of view to develop solutions that are a better fit for all.

Curious
Eagerly learn more about a subject, situation or person.

Fair
See others' views, experiences and knowledge as being as important and valuable as your own.

Seek alternatives
Reflect, looking outside your own context, and consider many possible options, methods and tools.

Collaborative and creative problem-solving

Imaginative
Imagine a new or different way of doing things to tackle the problems of today.

Outcomes focused
Focus on the change and impact you want to see and how to measure it.

Proactive
Be willing to take practical action to deal with a problem or situation.

Tenacious
Navigate setbacks or failures. Strive to achieve your objectives even if it takes you several attempts.

Prototype and iterate
Create and test an idea, learn quickly what works, improve it and try again.

Articulate the benefit
Translate insights into persuasive examples and sell a vision for what a project can achieve.

Resolute
Face a complex issue with determination. Don't allow the fear of failure to drive strategic decisions.

Build momentum
Rally others across your networks who can support you to find the funding, space and time needed.

Learn by doing
Test new methods, tools, and technologies appropriate for the task. Learn what works, why and how it might be embedded or adopted.

Tolerate uncertainty
Look beyond the uncertainties and unknowns of today towards long term aims.

Initiate change
Do things differently, and create new spaces and opportunities that empower others to do so too.

This poster can also be downloaded at q.health.org.uk/skills-for-collaborative-change

Team mapping

The aim of this exercise is to create a 'heat map' of the team's strengths, exploring the range of skills and attitudes that team members feel they possess and understanding how these can be used well in a piece of work. It also facilitates good conversations about any skills gaps you may have across the team.

This exercise could be helpful for existing teams to understand the diversity of skills, or for new teams or those starting new projects, to assess whether the required skills and attitudes are present.

Remember! The map focuses on developing strong teams rather than heroic individuals.

No one person has all the skills and attitudes we've outlined here, so please don't see this as a checklist. The skills map presents a range of skills and attitudes and so the challenge is to combine them in ways that make the team greater than its individual members.

4-6 People	45-60 Minutes	1 x A1 print of the Q Lab Skills Map 2 x A4 prints of the "skills cards" per team Coloured sticky dots. Pens: markers/felt-tips

| Step 1	**Introducing the skills map**
Introduction Have the skills map printed out and attached to a wall, visible to all team members. Set the skills cards out on a table.	Briefly summarise what the skills map is, explaining the structure and content. Use the descriptions and details found on pages 6–7. This map is to help articulate the skills and attitudes needed for collaborative and creative problem-solving within a health and care context. It focuses on understanding the skills needed for a team rather than at an individual level.
5 minutes	**Tip:** An A1 print of the skills map is ideal, but smaller can work if you have printing limitations.

Step 2	**A) Reflecting on core skills**
Identifying skills and attitudes Provide each team member with six sticky dots. Ideally each person will have a different colour.	Ask people to look at the skills cards. Give them a couple of minutes to read through and reflect individually on the skill descriptions, and ask them to make a list of their top three core skills. It may be helpful if they ask themselves what skills would my (closest) colleagues consider as my strengths? **B) Mapping the skills** With three of their coloured sticky dots, ask each team member to mark on the map their top three skills, placing the dot just above the skill title. Ask people to add a legend to the sheet, so it's clear which dots belong to whom. **C) Discussing core skills** If they are familiar with each other, ask people to discuss their top three skill choices with their colleagues. Do they recognise these skills in their colleagues? Repeat task B (mapping the skills), but this time exploring the team's core attitudes: What attitudes would their colleagues consider their core ones? Or consider what defines them as a person/professional/innovator?
20 minutes	**Tip:** If there are more people than colours available, participants may add their initials to the dots.

Step 3	A) Identify what people perceive to be their greatest strength
Identifying superpowers Everyone will need a marker or felt-tip pen for this stage.	Everyone should now have six dots on the map, three skills and three attitudes. Ask people to pick what they consider to be their strongest skill and their strongest attitude, their 'superpowers'. Give them a few moments to consider this, and then ask them to circle their top attitude and skill on the map using a marker. **B) Discussing superpowers** If they are familiar with each other, ask people to discuss their superpowers with colleagues. Do they recognise these skills in their colleagues? Are there any common superpowers? If so, what might this mean for your team?
10 minutes	**Tip:** Try to have team members use a coloured pen that matches the colour of their dot.

Step 4	A) Reflecting on what the team has mapped
Discussing the heat map Everyone will need a marker or felt-tip pen for this stage.	• What do they see? • What do they consider the strengths of the team? (ie where are the most dots?) • Is this reflected in the team's work? Are there any gaps? Are the gaps a bad thing? • How might a team plug any gaps? By recruiting, training, or perhaps collaborating with others? • Discussing this across the room (if there are multiple teams) are there similarities across different teams? • Are there skills people think they possess, but don't have the opportunity to apply in their role? Why is this, and what might be done to change it? **B) Concluding the activity** Any final reflections? Would they consider using this at the start of a project with their colleagues? Or do they see other opportunities?
5–10 minutes	**Tip:** These are suggested questions, feel free to expand on and ask your own.

Other ways to use the skills map

The exercise described on the previous page is the core activity for using the skills map, however, this isn't its only purpose. Here are a few other ways to use the map:
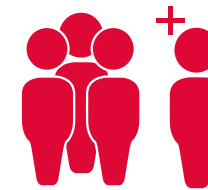
Team design

When putting together a project team, or bringing new people into your existing team, it can be useful to identify what skills and attitudes are required.

Follow the team mapping exercise until step 4.

At step 4 have a discussion about each other's strengths and blind spots.

• Are there any obvious gaps that your team has? (Remember: not all gaps are bad, discuss what the impact of this gap may be.)
• Do you want to address the gaps?
• Would it make sense to collaborate with somebody who has those missing skills or attitudes?
• Is there potential to develop those skills in the team, who might want to develop them, and how?

Icebreaker*

Events or work sessions may require briefly working with people from outside your own organisation, department or usual team. Using this skills map is helpful for getting to know new people in an interactive and thoughtful way. It helps people to look past hierarchy, structure and technical skills and supports people to communicate and learn from each other on a level playing field. It demonstrates that everyone can contribute, and shows where that contribution might best be made.

Follow the team mapping exercise until step 4.

At step 4 have a discussion about the task in hand and how people's core skills and attitudes may relate to this.

*This activity works best when people have some level of psychological safety with each other; encourage people to have confidence and be as open as they feel able to.
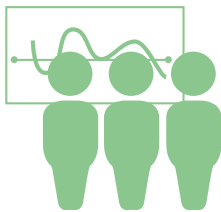
Project reflection

Teams don't always take the time to stop and reflect on their successes and failures. Identifying why things did or didn't go well is important in order to learn from them.

Take a current or recently completed project. Write out (possibly using a journey map tool) all the highs and lows to this point.

Follow the team mapping exercise until step 4.

- At step 4 discuss where people have observed these skills in action on that specific project.
- What happened during the high points, what skills were potentially missing during the low points?
- Could a certain skill have played a positive role during one of the low points? What could be done (in terms of skills or attitudes) to avoid this low point happening again?

Although we encourage using the skills map within a team, it can also be used to consider your individual strengths or help shape personal development goals.

Discussing your strengths and potentially your weaknesses may feel like a daunting task, especially if you are in a new team. Reflecting individually can allow us to be a little more honest in where we excel, but also in where we could improve.

1 Person	25-30 Minutes	1 x A3 print of Individual reflection map Pens: markers/felt-tips Sticky notes

Personal reflection on skills and attitudes

Reflecting on your own skills and attitudes has several benefits:

- It helps you to articulate your skills, giving you confidence in understanding your strengths and the contributions they make to your work. It's empowering to understand where you can add most value to your team.
- It helps to make connections between your behaviours and emotions. Is there an underlying reason why you're successful in demonstrating certain skills in your work, but not others? What could be done to change this?
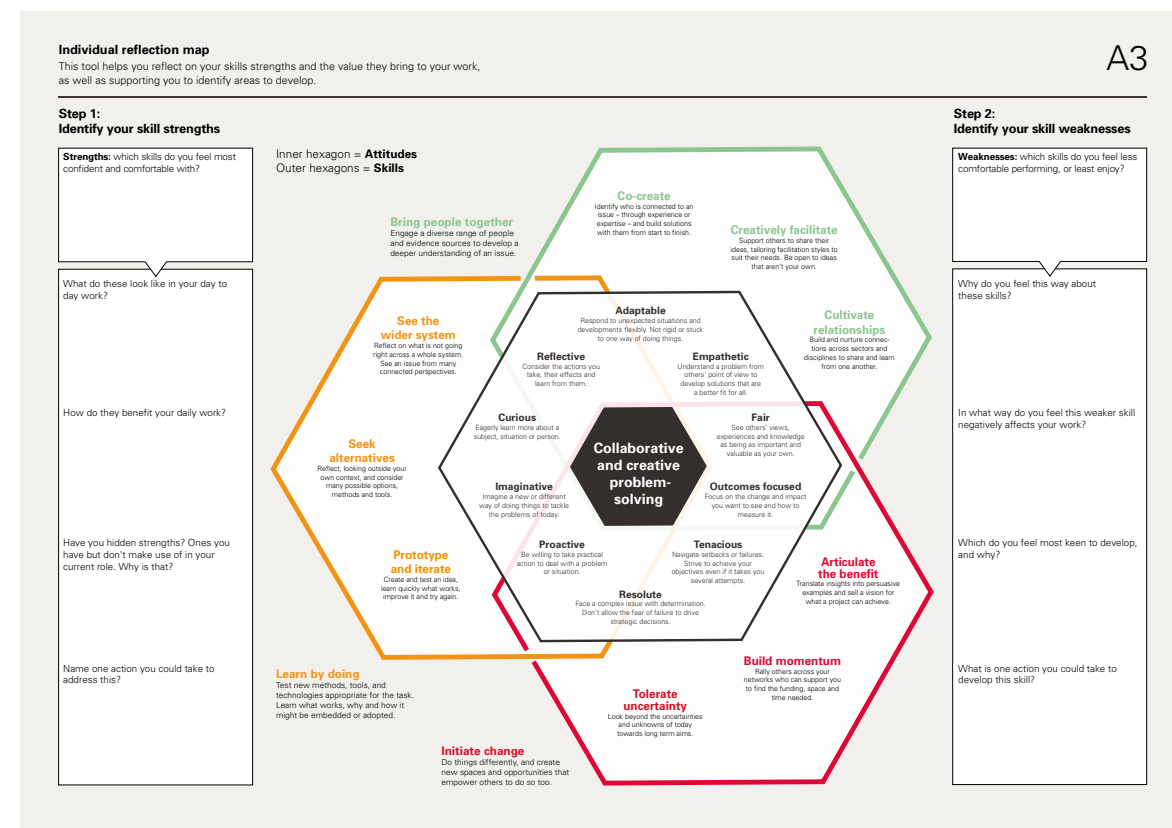- It helps to identify the areas in which you could improve and to articulate the value of this.

Print out the worksheet entitled 'Individual reflection map' at A3 size.

(This can be found at the end of this user guide or downloaded from q.health.org.
uk/skills-for-collaborative-change).

- Read through the skills map, reflect on which skills you recognise and think
  about how you currently use them in your practice.
- Now, follow the step-by-step instructions on the worksheet.
- You should come away with a greater awareness of your skill strengths, how
  you use them, and how you could further apply them.
- Plus, you should have identified skills which would be beneficial to develop
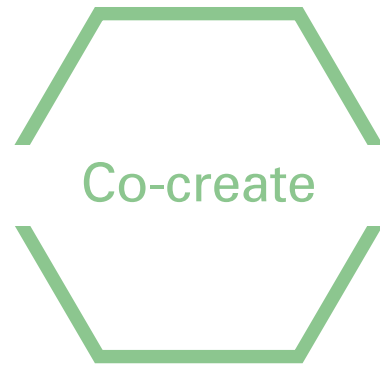 and started to think about ideas for how to do this.

Resources

An A3 sized reflection map is included. This can be printed and used as the exercises suggest or can be downloaded from q.health.org.uk/skills-for-collaborative-change

Also included are skills and attitudes cards which can be cut out and used alongside the skills map. There are two blank card spaces which can be used as replacements should you need them.
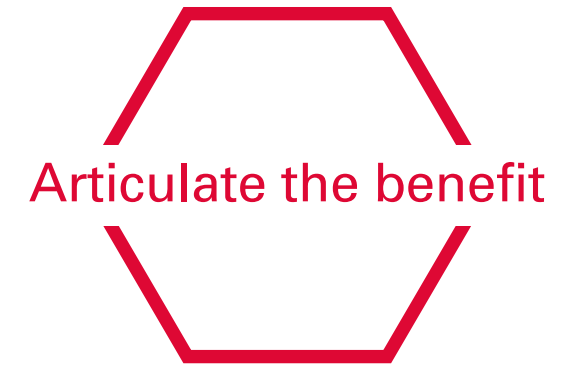
Bring people together

Skills card

Initiate change

Skills card

Co-create

Identify who is connected to an issue – through experience or expertise – and build solutions with them from start to finish.

Articulate the benefit

Translate insights into persuasive examples and sell a vision for what a project can achieve.

Bring people together

Skills card

Initiate change

Skills card

Creatively facilitate

Support others to share their ideas, tailoring facilitation styles to suit their needs. Open to ideas that aren't your own.
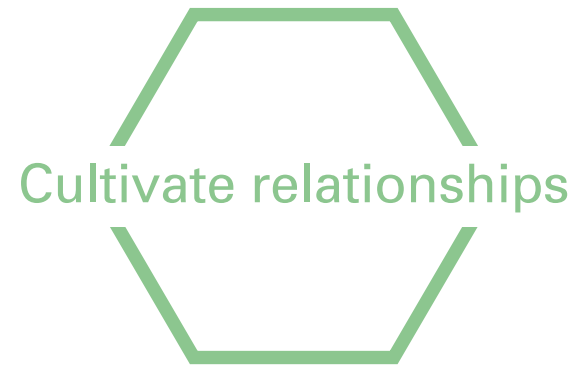
Tolerate uncertainty

Look beyond the uncertainties and unknowns of today towards long term aims.

Bring people together

Skills card

Initiate change

Skills card

Cultivate relationships

Build and nurture connections across sectors and disciplines to share and learn from one another.

Build momentum
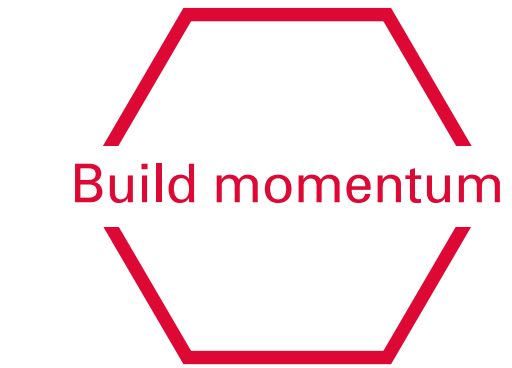
Rally others across your networks who can support you to find the funding, space and time needed.

Skills cards

Initiate change

See the wider system
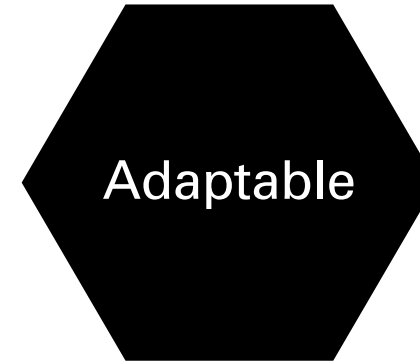
Reflect on what is not going right across a whole system. See an issue from many connected perspectives.

Adaptable

Respond to unexpected situations and developments flexibly. Not rigid or stuck to one way of doing things.

Empathetic
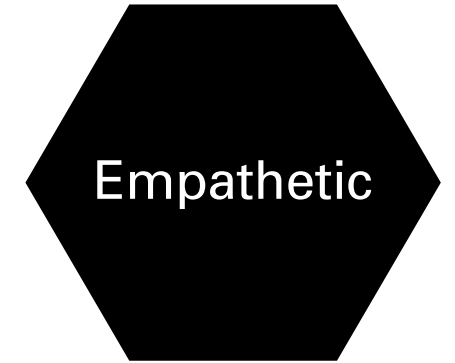
Understand a problem from others' point of view to develop solutions that are a better fit for all.

Initiate change

Seek alternatives

Reflect, looking outside your own context, and consider many possible options, methods and tools.

Initiate change

Prototype and iterate

Create and test an idea, learn quickly what works, improve it and try again.

Reflective

Consider the actions you take, their effects and learn from them.

Curious
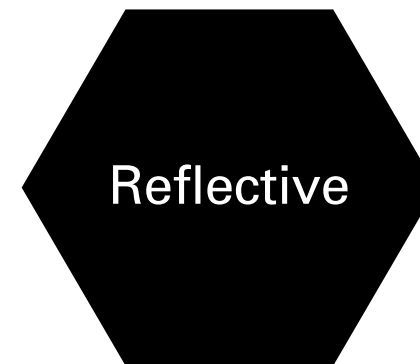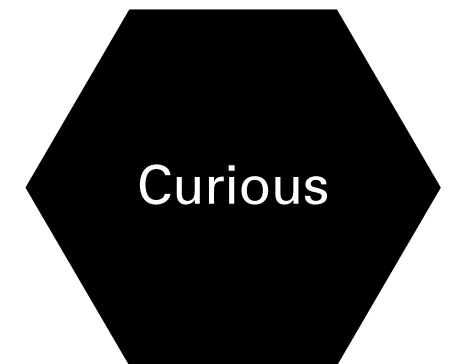
Eagerly learn more about a subject, situation or person.
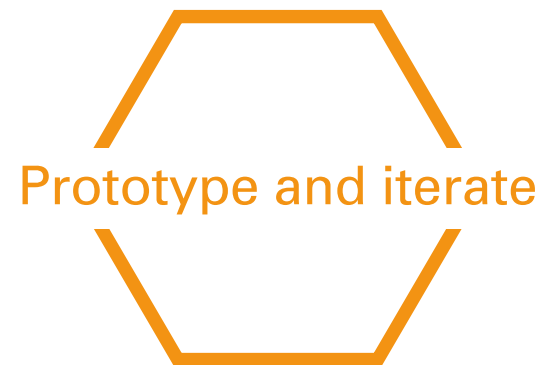
Attitudes card

Imaginative
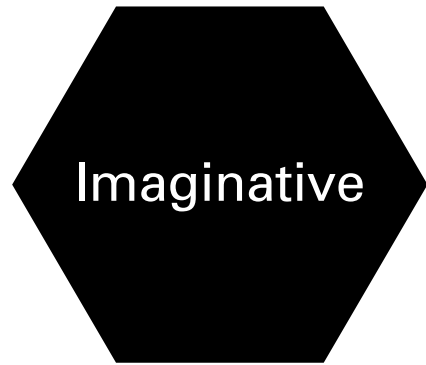
Imagine a new or different way of doing things to tackle the problems of today.

Attitudes card

Proactive

Be willing to take practical action to deal with a problem or situation.

Attitudes card
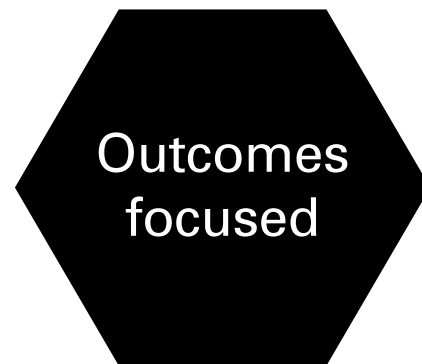
Tenacious
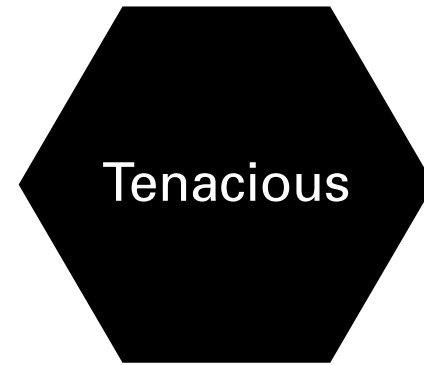
Navigate setbacks or failures. Strive to achieve your objectives even if it takes you several attempts.

Attitudes card
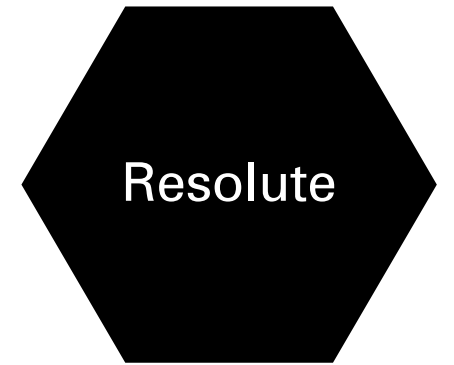
Resolute

Face a complex issue with determination. Don't allow the fear of failure to drive strategic decisions.

Attitudes card

Fair

See others' views, experiences and knowledge as being as important and valuable as your own.

Attitudes card

Outcomes focused

Focus on the change and impact you want to see and how to measure it.

Individual reflection map

This tool helps you reflect on your skills strengths and the value they bring to your work, as well as supporting you to identify areas to develop.

A3

Step 1:
Identify your skill strengths

Strengths: which skills do you feel most confident and comfortable with?

What do these look like in your day to day work?

How do they benefit your daily work?

Have you hidden strengths? Ones you have but don't make use of in your current role. Why is that?

Name one action you could take to address this?

Inner hexagon = **Attitudes**
Outer hexagons = **Skills**

Co-create
Identify who is connected to an issue – through experience or expertise – and build solutions with them from start to finish.

Creatively facilitate
Support others to share their ideas, tailoring facilitation styles to suit their needs. Be open to ideas that aren't your own.

Bring people together
Engage a diverse range of people and evidence sources to develop a deeper understanding of an issue.

Cultivate relationships
Build and nurture connections across sectors and disciplines to share and learn from one another.

See the wider system
Reflect on what is not going right across a whole system. See an issue from many connected perspectives.

Adaptable
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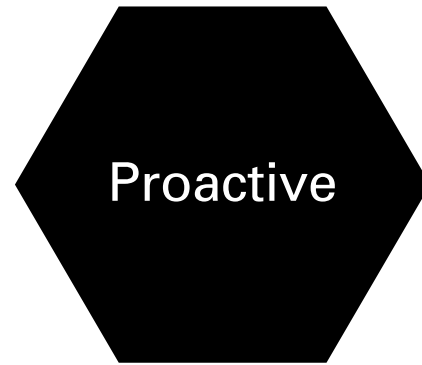
Resolute
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Articulate the benefit
Translate insights into persuasive examples and sell a vision for what a project can achieve.

Learn by doing
Test new methods, tools, and technologies appropriate for the task. Learn what works, why and how it might be embedded or adopted.

Build momentum
Rally others across your networks who can support you to find the funding, space and time needed.

Tolerate uncertainty
Look beyond the uncertainties and unknowns of today towards long term aims.

Initiate change
Do things differently, and create new spaces and opportunities that empower others to do so too.

Step 2:
Identify your skill weaknesses

Weaknesses: which skills do you feel less comfortable performing, or least enjoy?

Why do you feel this way about these skills?

In what way do you feel this weaker skill negatively affects your work?

Which do you feel most keen to develop, and why?

What is one action you could take to develop this skill?