Using the Relational Depth Framework: A Stakeholder Guide

Purpose of This Guide

The **Relational Depth Framework** offers a way to understand and improve how people engage with AI—not just in terms of capability or performance, but in terms of reflection, intention, and human-centered value.

This guide is designed to translate that framework into practice. It offers **role-specific strategies, examples, and entry points** for anyone looking to deepen their AI engagement—whether you're an educator designing assignments, a product team building features, a policymaker drafting regulation, or a student exploring creative potential.

At its core, this guide affirms that:

- **AI is not neutral**—how we relate to it shapes what becomes possible.

- **Relational depth is learnable and observable**—and it can be designed for, cultivated, and reflected on.

- **Purpose matters**—tools should serve people, not the other way around.

By bringing relational depth into your work, you're not just using a new model—you're helping shape a culture of thoughtful, principled, and just innovation.

Quick Start

No matter your background or familiarity with AI, this guide is built to be practical and adaptable.

How to Begin:

- ✅ **No prior AI expertise required** – The framework is intuitive and human-first.

- 🎯 **Start by identifying your role** – Are you an educator? Designer? Learner? Find your section.

- 🌀 **Refer to the visual framework** – See Appendix C to understand the levels of relational depth at a glance.

- 🧭 **Consider your purpose** – Use Appendix E (The Purpose Lens) to check whether your AI use aligns with meaningful goals.

- 📌 **Use what fits** – Start small. Pick one level, one prompt, or one shift that resonates— and build from there

Stakeholder Use Cases

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1. Educators

Educators play a pivotal role in shaping how the next generation understands and relates to AI. The Relational Depth Framework equips instructors with a developmental lens to move beyond surface-level AI use and toward deeper, more meaningful engagements.

How to Use It:

- **Assess Engagement**: Use the framework to identify how students currently engage with AI. For example, a student who uses ChatGPT to complete a reading summary without reflection may be operating at Level 1 (Personal Prompting). In contrast, one who iteratively drafts and revises their essay using feedback from the tool might be closer to Level 3 (Contextual Grounding).

- **Scaffold Progression**: Design lesson plans or module activities that intentionally scaffold across Levels 1–4. Begin with basic prompting tasks, build toward reflection activities, and gradually introduce collaborative creative exercises.

- **Integrate Reflection**: Embed short reflective exercises that ask students to name the level they're working from and explore why. Example prompt: "What level of the Relational Depth Framework do you feel you're using today, and what would it take to move deeper?"

- **Cross-Disciplinary Use**: Applicable across disciplines—from humanities to STEM. In ethics courses, the framework can spark dialogue about responsible technology use. In creative writing or design, it can shape co-creative workflows.

- **Student Growth**: Use the framework as a formative feedback tool to track how students' relationships with AI evolve over time.

Extra Tip: Use the Appendix D (SDGs & INNOVATE) to frame how relational AI practices connect to global citizenship, justice, and ethical responsibility.

Coming Soon: A dedicated **Educator Workshop Kit** with slide decks, in-class activities, and reflective rubrics.

2. Designers & Developers

Designers and developers are the architects of how human–AI relationships take shape. The Relational Depth Framework helps these practitioners build systems that don't just *function*—but *relate* more meaningfully to users.

How to Use It:

- **Audit Intentionality**: Use the framework as a design review tool. Ask: "What level are we actually designing for?" A chatbot that only responds to commands may be at Level 1 (Personal Prompting), whereas one that adapts to context, tone, or user needs may reflect Level 4 (Contextual Grounding).

- **Expand Design Ethos**: Move from usability-only goals to purpose-driven relational goals. This means incorporating reflective elements, user intention modeling, and ethical prompts into product workflows.

- **Layer Purpose with Functionality**: Use Appendix E (Purpose Lens) to assess whether your features serve a deeper need, not just technical polish. Are you designing *with* users—or merely *for* them?

- **Prototype with the Levels**: Test features across multiple framework levels. For example:

  - Level 2: A feature that offers multiple phrasing suggestions

  - Level 3: A dashboard that reflects user tone or learning history

  - Level 4+: Tools that adapt based on community values or long-term relational goals

- **Support Team Conversations**: Encourage cross-functional teams to reflect on how AI decisions—data, logic, UX—impact relational depth. Make the levels a shared vocabulary in sprint planning or retrospectives.

Extra Tip: Use Appendix D to connect relational design with real-world impact—especially if aligning your product to the UN SDGs or institutional ethics goals.

Coming Soon: A **Relational Design Card Set** to use in ideation, wireframing, and user research sprints.

3. Students & Lifelong Learners

As explorers of knowledge and self-direction, students and lifelong learners are uniquely positioned to shape the future of AI relationships. The Relational Depth Framework provides a personal roadmap for deepening your engagement with AI—not just as a tool, but as a thinking partner.

How to Use It:

- **Self-Assess Your Habits**: Start by asking, "What level am I typically operating at?" For instance, are you just using AI to get quick answers (Level 1)? Or are you refining your ideas through conversation, iteration, or context-awareness (Level 3 or 4)?

- **Reflect Routinely**: Keep a **relational AI journal** to document how your usage evolves. Use the framework levels as reference points. Ask: "What did I use AI for today—and how could I have gone deeper?"

- **Set Level-Based Challenges**: Try weekly personal challenges to explore higher levels:

  - **Level 2**: Use AI to compare multiple perspectives on a topic.

  - **Level 3**: Revise a project draft using contextual feedback from AI.

  - **Level 4**: Collaborate with AI to co-create a personal learning plan aligned with your long-term goals.

- **Partner With Peers**: Choose a shared task or project and intentionally work at a higher level together. Compare how relational depth influences your thinking or outcomes.

- **Track Your Growth**: Create a visual tracker or checklist using the levels to see how your AI engagement has matured over time. Share reflections with mentors or learning communities.

Extra Tip: Use Appendix E to clarify whether your AI use is truly aligned with your purpose—or simply convenient. Your time and attention deserve intentionality.

Coming Soon: A **Self-Diagnostic Tool** and **Relational Growth Journal Template** designed specifically for independent learners and student groups.

4. Institutional Leaders & Funders

Institutional decision-makers play a vital role in shaping the conditions under which AI is adopted, developed, and assessed. The Relational Depth Framework helps leaders evaluate whether their strategies foster meaningful, ethical, and future-ready relationships with technology—across education, research, and innovation systems.

How to Use It:

- **Evaluate Program Depth**: Use the framework to assess internal or funded initiatives. Are they just "using AI" (Level 1–2), or are they fostering reflective, context-sensitive, and co-creative engagements (Level 4–5)?

- **Guide Strategic Priorities**: Incorporate the Relational Depth Framework into strategic planning documents or internal review processes. Ask: "Which levels are we investing in—and which levels represent the future we want to build?"

- **Align With Global Impact Goals**: Use **Appendix D** to explicitly link relational AI practices to the UN SDGs and the INNOVATE principles. This strengthens public value narratives and supports grant alignment and social impact reporting.

- **Support Relational Innovation**: Prioritize funding for projects, curricula, and research that foster Levels 4–6. These are the levels where iterative co-creation, transformative learning, and systemic responsiveness emerge.

- **Equip Your Teams**: Host training sessions or retreats using the framework to help internal teams explore their assumptions and reframe the purpose of AI within your institution.

Extra Tip: When reviewing proposals or partnerships, include one reflection question based on the framework: "What Relational Depth level does this project aspire to reach—and how will it support others in reaching it?"

Coming Soon: A **Leadership Briefing Kit** with a sample strategic audit worksheet, staff facilitation guide, and funding alignment scorecard.

5. Policymakers & Ethicists

Policymakers and ethicists shape the guardrails, incentives, and collective conversations that define how AI unfolds in society. The Relational Depth Framework provides a layered, human-centered model that complements technical or rights-based approaches—adding relational nuance to how we govern, evaluate, and co-create with AI.

How to Use It:

- **Support Governance by Depth**: Use the framework to distinguish between superficial use cases (Levels 0–1) and deeper, more ethically complex engagements (Levels 3–6). This helps focus regulation and support where the stakes are highest.

- **Embed in Public Consultation**: In participatory foresight exercises or AI hearings, use the framework to guide dialogue. Ask citizens: "What kind of relationship do you want with AI—and at what level does that live?"

- **Anticipate Future Dilemmas**: Levels 4–6 often surface new challenges around authorship, agency, accountability, and co-creation. Use these levels to guide anticipatory ethics practices and regulatory foresight.

- **Reframe AI Risk and Opportunity**: Shift the conversation from "What can AI do?" to "How are we relating to AI—and what futures does that make possible or impossible?"

- **Use the Appendices**: Align ethics conversations with **Appendix D (SDGs + INNOVATE)** to ground values in globally recognized goals. Use **Appendix E (Purpose Lens)** to assess whether a given AI use case meets public-interest standards beyond performance metrics.

Extra Tip: Include a question about relational depth in ethics reviews or impact assessments: "Which level of relational depth is this technology enabling—and is that level appropriate for its intended purpose and audience?"

Coming Soon: A **Policy & Ethics Dialogue Kit** featuring sample language for ethics guidelines, facilitation templates for foresight sessions, and use-case classifiers by level.

🧠 Sample Prompts for Any Role

These prompts are designed to help users, teams, and communities apply the Relational Depth Framework as an internal compass—not just a descriptive model. They can be used in reflections, workshops, team meetings, or journaling.

Individual Reflection Prompts:

- What level do I tend to operate from—and why?

- What level am I being invited to try in this task or relationship?

- Where does my current use of AI feel purposeful? Where does it feel automatic or unexamined?

- How might I experiment with one level deeper? What would change?

Team & Collaborative Prompts:

- What relational depth level is our team currently designing for?

- Is there alignment between our stated purpose and our AI usage?

- Which levels are we incentivizing in our students, users, or partners?

- What blind spots or risks emerge if we stay at lower levels?

Purpose Lens Prompts (from Appendix E):

- Does this interaction serve a real human need—or just efficiency?

- What are the ethical or societal implications of staying at this level?

- Who is included, excluded, or transformed by this level of AI engagement?

🔮 Looking Ahead

The Relational Depth Framework is more than a snapshot—it's a launchpad for growing an ecosystem of tools, stories, and strategies for relational AI. As the framework gains traction, several supporting resources are in active development:

- 🧭 **Self-Diagnostic Tool**: A lightweight reflection tool to help users assess their current depth and receive next-step prompts.

- 🔴 **Relational Design Cards**: Visual prompts for workshops, classrooms, and design studios—one for each level of depth.

- 📚 **Workshop Kit**: A ready-to-run facilitation guide including exercises, slides, and reflection activities tailored to your context.

- 📖 **Living Case Library**: A curated archive of real-world examples showing how different stakeholders move across the framework's levels.

Together, these tools will support educators, innovators, strategists, and communities in designing AI futures that are not only technically capable—but **relationally wise**.

💬 Final Thought

AI is not just a tool—it's a relationship.
And like any relationship, it can be shallow, extractive, or transactional—or it can be mutual, reflective, and deeply human.

The Relational Depth Framework invites us to notice, name, and nurture the kind of relationships we want to build—with technology, with each other, and with the futures we are shaping.

"Relational depth isn't a feature—it's a practice. And practices, when shared, become culture."