

LEADING FOR EQUITY FRAMEWORK

National Equity Project's *Leading for Equity Framework* provides a frame of reference that enables leaders to navigate the complex territory of equity challenges and to develop the capacity to engage in purposeful leadership action. In its simplest form, the Framework helps build habits of mind that are continually in practice. In its more elaborated form, it provides a set of tools, frames and processes that leaders can use in their work.

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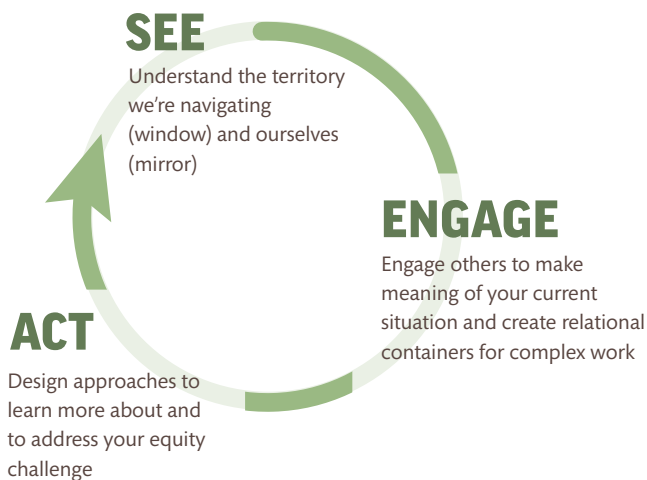
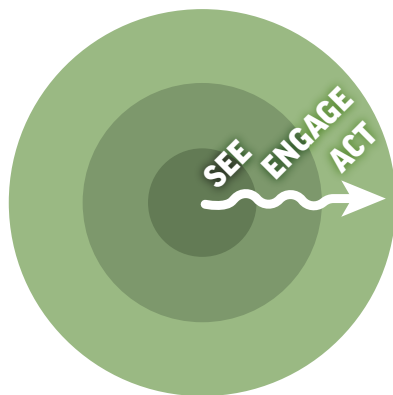
NATIONAL
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PROJECT



1 | Leading for Equity—Core Framework

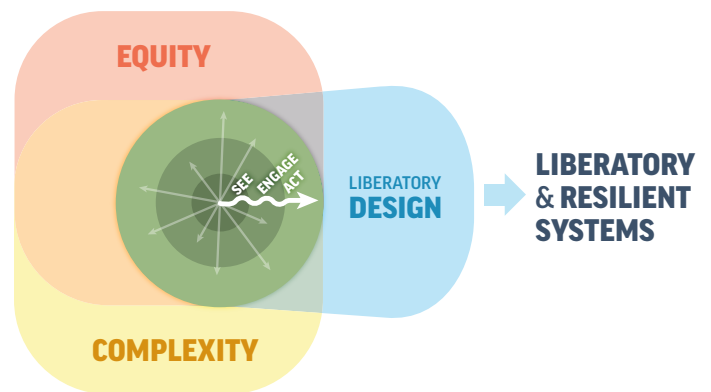
Leadership Stance See, Engage & Act

Equity leadership moves from the “inside-out,” as different from traditional leadership which tends to move top-down. How we **See** informs how we **Engage**, which informs how we **Act**.



Three Disciplines Equity, Complexity & Design

Each discipline contains theory, knowledge and approaches to practice. Understanding each of these, and their interrelationships, enables leaders to frame their challenges and focus their activities.



EQUITY

Developing equity consciousness (internal and external awareness of systemic oppression and its effects) and commitment (the will to take up equity challenges).

COMPLEXITY

Understanding the nature of complex systems, distinguishing between complex versus simple or complicated problems, and developing corresponding leadership approaches that match the actual complexity of equity challenges.

DESIGN

Approaching equity challenges through the mindset of user-centered design, which shifts traditional power dynamics related to decision-making and brings forth deeper innovation and agency amidst institutionalized norms and structures.

LIBERATORY & RESILIENT SYSTEMS

Often the goal of equity work is framed as closing achievement and/or opportunity gaps. Here we emphasize a goal of developing certain system conditions—that increase its capacity to bring about more equitable outcomes and experiences.

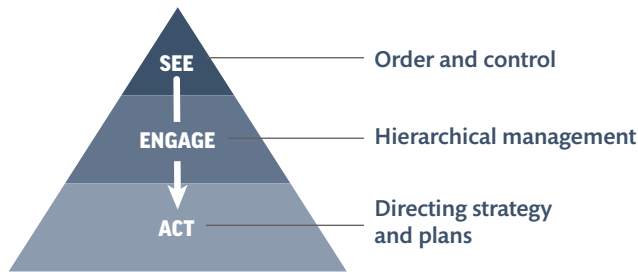


2 | Expanding Our Mental Model of Leadership

It is critical to recognize the nature of your situation and take the appropriate approach.

Traditional leadership

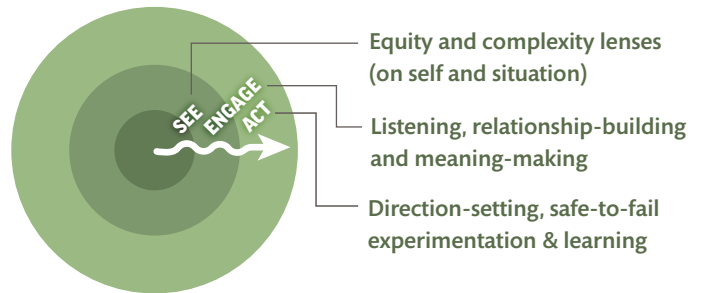
Controlled approach—top-down



Pyramid Leadership: This approach is appropriate when the problems are “simple” (obvious) or “complicated” (manageable and the solutions can be known). It is the dominant culture default leadership approach. **This approach emphasizes *performance*.**

Equity leadership

Emergent approach—inside-out



Circle Leadership: This approach is needed when problems are “complex” (messy and solutions can't be known in advance). Strategies must be developed through experimentation and learning. This approach runs counter to our deeply entrained notions of what good leadership is. **This approach emphasizes *learning*.**

SEE
(mindset)

- Role awareness** | our work is determined by our position and responsibilities
- Order and control** | leader's role is to bring rational functioning to often unruly, ineffective organizational behavior
- Technical lens** | equity is about identifying proper strategies
- Decision mindset** | identify decisions to be made

ENGAGE
(interactional stance)

- Message** | communicate what needs to happen
- Top-down** | use chain of command
- Confirm** | seek homogenous values and ideas
- Role defining** | job and task descriptions

ACT
(move work forward)

- Decision-making** | find the 'best' choice
- Planning, forecasting** | set longer-term goals, plan specific actions & strategies, then roll out
- Staying the course** | align and maintain focus

- Self awareness** | recognize that our identity shapes what we see and others experience us
- Situational awareness** | leader's role is to recognize what is currently happening in a context and the many dynamics at play
- Equity lens** | recognize how inequities are products of system oppression
- Design mindset** | recognize design opportunities

- Listen** | pay attention to people's experience
- Distributed leadership** | leadership across the system and team-driven leadership
- Diversify** | seek heterogenous input, especially from those impacted and those furthest from power
- Relationship building** | work with patterns of interaction

- Sense-making** | collective interpretation, meaning-making act/learn/plan at the same time
- Direction-setting** | set a few short-term goals, develop "minimum spec"/"skinny" plans
- Noticing emergent direction** | identify emerging patterns, amplify/dampen these



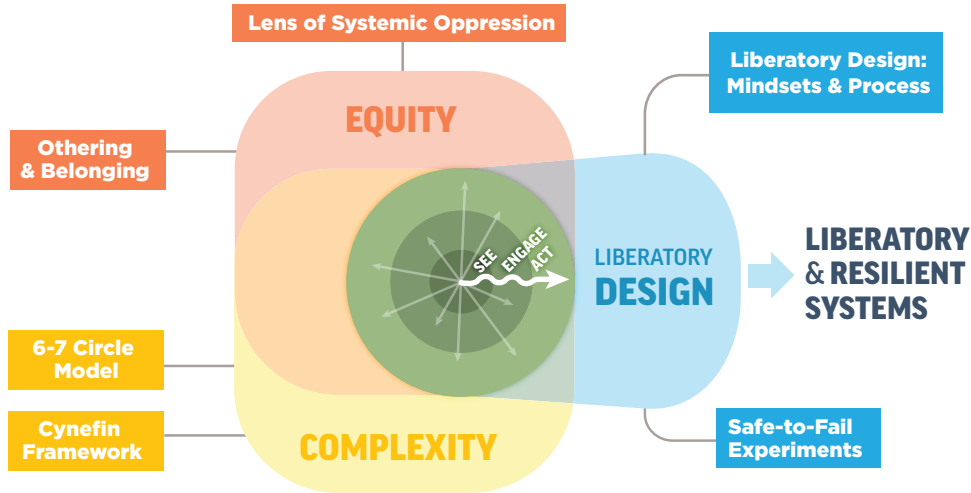
3 | Equity Leadership STANCES

Developing your stance is an important first step. It will help you stay in the game longer and prevent your actions from being distorted by emotion or distress.

	EQUITY	COMPLEXITY	DESIGN
SEE	<p>Use the lens of systemic oppression to recognize causes of inequity</p> <p>How am I continuing to deepen my self-awareness (mirror) and understanding of oppression in the world (window)?</p> <p>How am I recognizing the ways that various forms of oppression are contributing to this particular inequity?</p>	<p>Make sense of messy situations of complexity, change and uncertainty</p> <p>Which pieces of this problem or situation are predictable? Which have too many moving parts to know what might happen next?</p> <p>What are the stories I am hearing from people about this issue? What am I not hearing?</p>	<p>Recognize the design causes of inequity—and opportunities for redesign or new design</p> <p>How, in the midst of facing the reality of inequities, am I recognizing design opportunities?</p> <p>To what extent are people feeling empowered to generate change or new approaches?</p>
ENGAGE	<p>Engage multiple perspectives across identity & role/power difference</p> <p>What conditions are needed to talk across difference about issues that matter to people?</p> <p>How am I creating spaces for others to make meaning, engage, heal and develop agency?</p>	<p>Create conditions for sense-making</p> <p>How am I engaging others as I/we navigate and act in this situation?</p> <p>How am I creating the conditions for people to make meaning of this issue, take action, learn, and adapt—rather than being locked into planning and deployment?</p>	<p>Empathy, user engagement</p> <p>What don't I yet understand about the realities of those impacted by this inequity?</p> <p>How might I better understand how stakeholders are experiencing decisions, processes and initiatives I am responsible for leading?</p> <p>How are we creating conditions for insight and possibility to emerge?</p>
ACT	<p>Design to interrupt the effects of oppression and to enable liberation; universal goals and targeted strategies</p> <p>What will equity, liberation look in this context?</p> <p>How might this design process transform power and relationships and our own awareness?</p> <p>How will we know we're making progress?</p>	<p>Probe, experiment to learn about the system & situation—and what to amplify and dampen</p> <p>What safe-to-fail experiments can tell us more about the challenge and contributing factors?</p> <p>How might I use the diversity of perspectives about a situation or problem to create a wider and more diverse set of possible safe-to-fail experiments?</p>	<p>Create conditions for creative, empowered approach-generation</p> <p>How will we generate liberatory possibilities (ideation) and “build to learn” (rapid prototyping)?</p> <p>How will engage users in our prototypes early with an intention to transform power?</p> <p>What do we want to learn from what we try—and how will we learn it?</p>



4 | Equity Leadership KEY FRAMEWORKS



EQUITY

Lens of Systemic Oppression

A framework to help sharpen your equity lens and recognize the deeper causes of the inequity that are related to various forms of oppression. **When to use it:** Continually!

Othering & Belonging

An accessible framework that describes processes and forces that undergird group-based marginalization and inequality—and provides language by which we might more productively discuss and develop a range of inclusive responses.

When to use it: Continually!

COMPLEXITY

Cynefin Framework

A sense-making tool for making leadership decisions that distinguishes between 3 types of systems: obvious, complex and complicated.

When to use it: Use the Cynefin framework to discern the difference between a complex and complicated problems in order to make better decisions and use the appropriate process tools that match the situation.

6-7 Circle Model

A simplified model of a living system (organization) that includes both the relational and technical dimensions that make up work and human experience.

When to use it: Use the 6 Circle Model to explore and make meaning of your organization's current state when it comes to your work culture and the context in which work happens.

DESIGN

Safe-to-Fail Experiments

A form of inquiry and prototyping possible solutions to a problem to which you cannot know the answer in advance.

When to use it: Use safe-to-fail experiments when dealing with complex problems (e.g. equity challenges) that often require experimentation to discover promising solutions that cannot be known in advance.

Liberatory Design Mindsets

A creative approach-finding process designed to help equity leaders take action. It is informed by design thinking, complexity, and an understanding of systemic oppression. The Mindsets help ground a design process in an equity-centered stance and provide habits of mind to continually bring to any process.

When to use it: Use the Liberatory Design Mindsets at the outset of a design process, all the way through it, and when reflecting on a design process.

Liberatory Design Process

A creative approach-finding process designed to help equity leaders take action. It is informed by design thinking, complexity, and an understanding of systemic oppression. The "Notice" and "Reflect" moves help make the five design thinking moves more equity explicit.

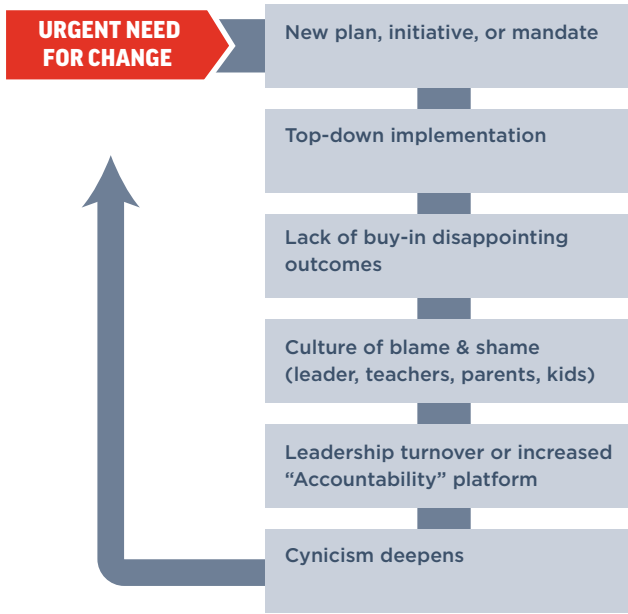
When to use it: Use Liberatory Design Process when approaching complex equity challenges. A design effort might include all of the Process "moves," or you might just be incorporating certain moves more explicitly into processes that aren't formally called Liberatory Design.



5 | Equity Leadership and Systems Change

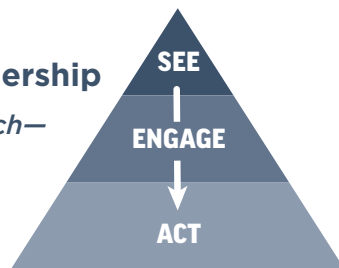
Reproductive System

How systems tend to work in ways that inhibit change capacity and reproduce inequity



Derived from Traditional leadership

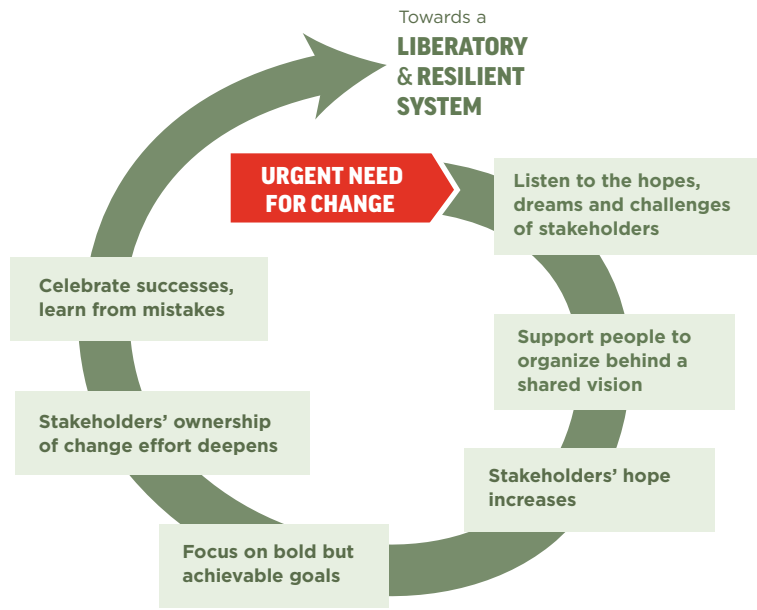
Controlled approach—top-down



Note: there is a "positive" type of pyramid leadership approach not represented here—i.e. when traditional leadership is appropriately and humanely exercised in complicated situations.

Liberatory, Resilient System

How systems transform by deepening their capacity for change and addressing equity challenges



Derived from Equity leadership

Emergent approach—inside-out

