

Think, Engage, and Act Differently

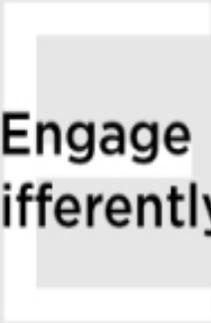
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Equity leadership is about being self-aware, self-correcting and self-directed and is vital in developing the transformational habits, skills and practices that demonstrate moral courage, independent judgment and bold action for leading in complex systems. To **think, engage** and **act differently** as an equity leader is about increasing your skill to anticipate, notice, and respond to changes in the environment. The process for unlocking one's innovative potential and increasing one's ability to engage and lead others in addressing inequity is rarely obvious or self evident on finding a way forward.

For instance, it's impossible to put forth simple (or even complicated) cause-and-effect explanations for the persistent racial inequities that we see across the country in public education. Yet, time and again, that is exactly what we see happening in the form of No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top, Common Core Standards and the newly enacted Every Student Succeeds Act. For equity leaders to take action requires, in part, a persuasive framework and language, as well as tools to help identify more effective routes to progress on seemingly intractable societal challenges.

In complex situations, equity leaders must concentrate on the present more than the future, look more toward the possible than the probable, and conduct safe-to-learn experiments to discover what might work. By taking multiple perspectives, asking different questions, and seeing more of the system within which they work, equity leaders can better understand themselves, their role and the world around them. As they grow, these habits enhance their performance and enable them to navigate the "not knowing" while still setting a direction for the emergence of solutions to address their most challenging equity issues.

Following is a sample how an equity leader can begin developing useful habits to think, engage and act differently when confronting equity challenges in a complex system.

Leadership Stance		Key Questions to Ask
 Think Differently	Develop your equity consciousness	<i>Do I have awareness and understanding of the forces behind the inequity I see? What forces are perpetuating the disparities I seek to address?</i>
	Make sense of messy situations of complexity, change and uncertainty.	<i>Which pieces of this problem or situation are predictable? Which have too many moving parts to know what might happen next?</i>
 Engage Differently	Lead and engage others from a growing equity consciousness and commitment	<i>How do I build my practice as a leader for equity starting with who I am and what I bring because of who I am?</i>
	Engage with multiple perspectives with stakeholders involved with and affected by the situation.	<i>What conditions are needed to talk across difference about issues that matter to people?</i>
 Act Differently	Use your equity consciousness to learn, inform and help guide leadership actions	<i>What will equity or racial equity in our context look like? How will I know we have made progress?</i>
	Enable systemic improvement that is ethical and justifiable to stakeholders involved in and impacted by the situation	<i>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?</i>

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We believe people have the capacity to solve their own problems. Consequently, in addition to knowing how to solve complicated problems, leadership development is about developing habits, skills and practices that are appropriate for addressing complex equity challenges. This involves developing habits and skills in undertaking cycles of observing, reflecting, planning and taking action. Developing a critical equity consciousness of how we think, engage and act is key in leading for equity in complex systems.