

Organizational Development Blueprint: Solving for Deeper Integration of Equity Principles



OVERVIEW

A Call for Deeper Integration

Many organizations have invested in diversity training, unconscious bias workshops, and inclusion committees. Yet, despite these efforts, meaningful progress often remains elusive.

The gap between intention and impact persists because traditional approaches frequently address symptoms rather than root causes, focus on individual awareness rather than systemic change, and fail to shift fundamental power dynamics.

This blueprint, of which you will read an overview, offers a different path forward. Based in the principles of **Liberatory Project Design**, it recognizes that achieving genuine equity requires more than additional programs or policies.

It demands a fundamental reimagining of how power operates within organizations and how design decisions are made.

Groups & Goals

This framework will help groups advance across many key priorities of enterprise and people management:

- cross cultural communication
- enhanced visibility and belonging
- mitigation through and/or management of difference of culture, class, race, ethnicity, and other identity areas

This framework can successfully alleviate stress factors around microaggressions, othering, and conflict.

It gives group members expansive ways of understanding systems of power – both visible and invisible, and how to engineer for expansion of power and higher collaboration and team satisfaction.

It also seeks to create an environment for cultural shifting, with more trust, mutuality, sustainability, and focus on the major mission attainment of the enterprise.

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I. Foundations of Liberatory Project Design

Origins and Core Principles

Liberatory Project Design represents an innovative approach to addressing equity challenges and implementing change efforts within complex organizational systems. Adapted from the National Equity Project's Leading for Equity Framework, this methodology integrates three distinct but complementary disciplines:

1. **Human-Centered Design:** Placing the experiences and needs of those most impacted at the center of decision-making processes
2. **Complex Systems Theory:** Recognizing that organizations are intricate networks of relationships, policies, and practices that interact in non-linear ways
3. **Deep Equity Practice:** Engaging with historical and contemporary power dynamics to interrupt patterns of oppression

At its core, Liberatory Project Design seeks to transform organizational power by fundamentally shifting the relationships between those who traditionally hold design authority and those who are impacted by organizational decisions.

Rather than maintaining hierarchical structures where power flows unidirectionally from leadership to employees or from organizations to communities, this approach distributes design authority more equitably.

The framework creates intentional designs that accomplish two critical objectives:

Interrupting Inequity: By identifying and dismantling systemic barriers, policies, and practices that perpetuate disadvantage for marginalized groups.

Increasing Opportunity: By expanding access, resources, and agency for those who have been historically excluded or underserved by organizational systems.

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Practical Application for Organizations

For enterprises ready to adopt this approach, Liberatory Project Design offers a pathway to systemically embed equity into project scope and delivery. This is not about adding equity as an afterthought or checkbox item, but rather making it a foundational consideration in how work is conceived, planned, and executed.

The framework enables organizations to:

- **Connect values to impact:** Bridge the gap between stated organizational values and actual work, influence, and outcomes.
- **Generate critical learning:** Develop deeper understanding within project teams and across the broader organization about how systems perpetuate inequity.
- **Increase agency:** Build capacity for team members and stakeholders to identify and challenge inequitable practices
- **Maintain organizational identity:** Adapt design thinking principles without requiring wholesale abandonment of existing organizational culture or methodology.

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This flexibility makes the framework particularly powerful. It can inform both external practice (how organizations serve clients, customers, or communities) and internal operations (leadership structures, decision-making processes, and organizational culture).

II. Understanding Organizational Power

Beyond Traditional Conceptions of Power

To effectively implement Liberatory Project Design, organizations must first develop a more sophisticated understanding of how power operates within their structures. Drawing on the work of Lily Zheng in *DEI Deconstructed* (Berrett-Koehler, 2022) and other resources, we can identify multiple dimensions of organizational power that simultaneously influence outcomes.

Traditional Power: The Visible Dimension

Traditional power is the most recognizable form of organizational authority. It touches upon hierarchies, budgets, and other key structures.

Essential (Invisible) Power: The Hidden Dimension

Essential or invisible power operates beneath the surface of organizational life, yet profoundly shapes outcomes. This dimension includes “soft” factors including cultural norms, implicit biases, social capital, and more.

Liberatory Power: The Transformative Dimension

Liberatory power represents a fundamentally different approach to organizational authority. Rather than simply redistributing traditional or essential power among existing players, liberatory power seeks to transform the very nature of how power operates. Key characteristics include shared decision-making, transparency, accountability, and more.

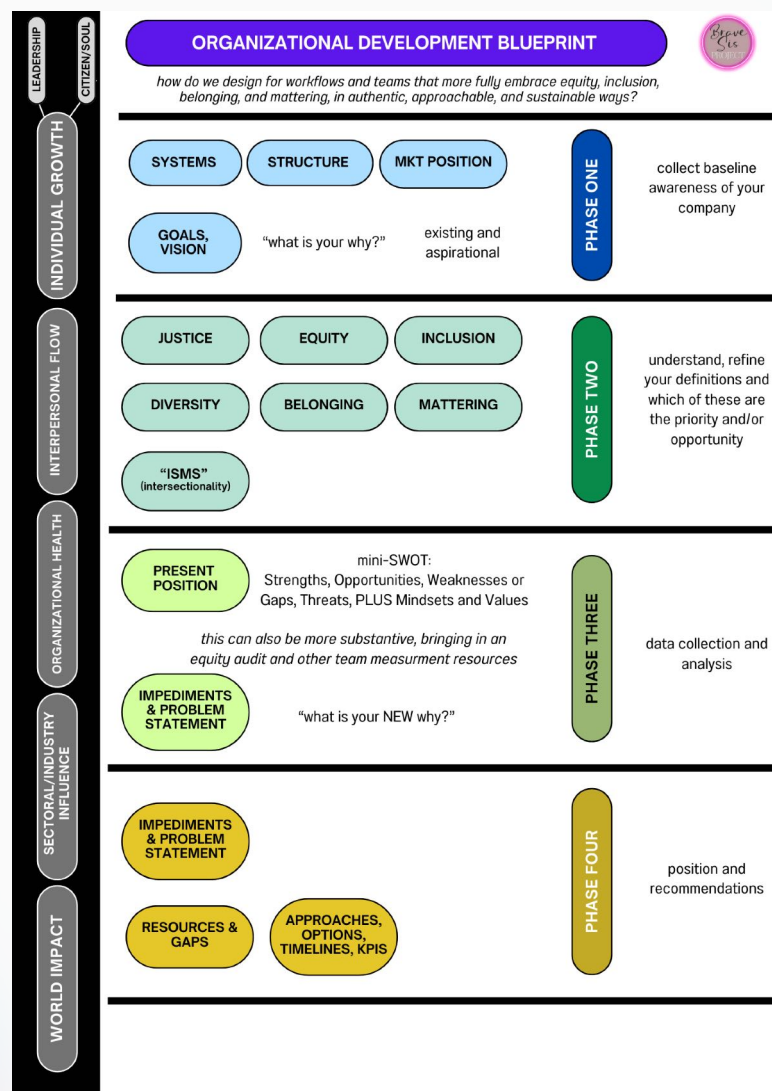
III. Implementation Framework

Starting Point: Identifying Your Vector of Change

Successful implementation of Liberatory Project Design begins with clarity about which vector of change and influence your group is most engaged with at any given moment. Organizations and workgroups typically navigate multiple change efforts simultaneously, and the framework must be adapted to your specific context, capacity, and objectives.

We will consider key lines of inquiry to ground your group's consensus and goals.

Understanding your primary vector of change helps determine which tools and approaches will be most relevant and impactful. **Facilitation and coaching leads the team through all points along this blueprint.**



Identifying your Nexus of Impact

Facilitation will assist you in indentifying and building consensus around:

Identifying Your Primary Vector of Organizational Influence

Preliminarily, organizations must establish clarity around which vector of change they seek to influence and engage with in the present moment. This foundational determination shapes all subsequent design decisions and intervention strategies.

Differentiated Pathways for Leadership Development

Supporting leadership development at scale, cultivating emerging leaders to enhance organizational capacity, strengthening the overall talent and leadership pipeline within specific sectors or fields, or—at a more intimate organizational level—supporting team members in their developmental journeys toward becoming more equitable, inclusive, and justice-oriented practitioners in their everyday work.

Organizational Scale and Depth of Engagement

Helpful for smaller groups, this inquiry extends to understanding how cohesion and collaborative dynamics authentically reflect the values and operational principles of the institution writ large. For larger enterprises, this represents a more deeply embedded and complex systemic undertaking.

Sectoral Influence and Strategic Positioning

For smaller and mid-sized enterprises positioning themselves as thought leaders or innovators within their specific industries or sectors, this work helps establish an equitable and liberatory approach, and strategic positioning creates ripple effects that extend beyond the immediate organization.

Systemic Transformation at Scale

System-level approaches to equity integration that genuinely shift organizational dynamics across the entirety of the enterprise rather than isolated departments or initiatives.

Phase 1: Establishing Foundations

Step 1: Agree on Fundamental Lines of Inquiry

Before diving into solutions, successful equity work requires alignment on the questions you're collectively trying to answer. This is not about premature consensus on answers, but rather shared understanding of what you're investigating.

We will help you develop key lines of inquiry to ground your group's consensus and goals.

Establishing these questions requires inclusive dialogue. Different stakeholders will surface different concerns based on their position within the organization and their lived experience. The goal is not to immediately reconcile all perspectives, but to create a shared map of the territory you're exploring together.



Step 2: Provide/Collect Baseline Information

Equity work must be grounded in organizational reality. This phase involves gathering comprehensive baseline information about your company or group across multiple dimensions.

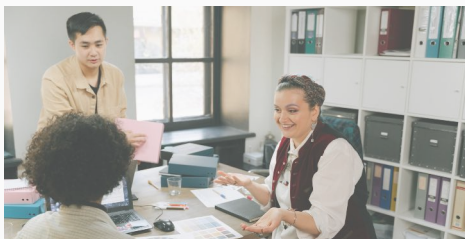
We will lead you in developing/articulating this baseline, which establishes both a factual foundation for subsequent work and a benchmark against which to measure progress. It also builds credibility by demonstrating commitment to evidence-based practice rather than assumptions or good intentions alone.

Step 3: Understand and Refine Definitions

Language matters profoundly in equity work. Terms like "diversity," "inclusion," "equity," "belonging," and "justice" carry different meanings in different contexts. Moreover, so do related concepts like "allies," "advocates," "co-conspirators," and "accomplices."

It is imperative to consider the weight of words. Slang, insider speak, acronyms, and even everyday expressions that are part of our regular parlance ("he killed it," "you are my guru") can abut against appropriation, racial or gender discrimination, ableism and homophobia. (See "[When Seeking Equitable Outcomes, Words Matter](#)" and [YouTube presentation](#).)

We will work with your team to interrogate and clarify terminology, priorities, and surface any tensions.



Investing time in definitional clarity prevents confusion and conflict later. It also builds shared language that enables more precise and productive conversations about equity challenges and solutions.

Phase 2: Deep Investigation:

Step 1: Collect and Analyze Data

With foundations established, deeper investigation becomes possible. This phase can take several forms depending on organizational readiness, resources, and needs through both formal and informal approaches.

Step 2: The Equity Audit

The equity audit deserves special attention as a powerful diagnostic tool. A thorough equity audit examines organizational systems across multiple dimensions including policies and processes, leadership and accountability, decision-making, workplace culture, and resource allocation.

Step 3: Define Current Position and Develop Recommendations

Organizations can now develop evidence-based recommendations for advancing equity. across **situational analyses, recommendation development, implementation planning, and sustainability considerations.**

Service Offerings and Support Structures

Organizations implementing this framework rarely succeed in isolation. The complexity of equity work, combined with the emotional and political challenges it can raise, makes external support and structured learning valuable. Support structures might include:

Individual and Group Coursework

Structured learning opportunities that build equity competency across the organization:

- Foundations in equity analysis and power mapping
 - Liberatory design methodologies
 - Facilitating difficult conversations about identity and power
 - Data analysis through an equity lens
 - Change management for equity initiatives
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Leadership and ERG Coaching

Targeted support for those leading equity efforts, whether formal organizational leaders or members of Employee Resource Groups and affinity networks. Coaching can help:

- Navigate organizational politics and resistance
 - Maintain momentum when progress feels slow
 - Process the emotional dimensions of equity work
 - Develop strategies for building broader coalitions
 - Balance urgent needs with sustainable pacing
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Equity Audits

Comprehensive organizational assessments conducted by experienced practitioners who can:

- Bring external perspective and credibility
 - Apply rigorous methodologies honed across multiple organizational contexts
 - Surface difficult truths with less organizational risk than internal practitioners might face
 - Provide comparative benchmarking against similar organizations
 - Deliver recommendations grounded in both data and equity frameworks
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Specific Sticking Point Engagement

Focused interventions when organizations encounter particular challenges such as:

- Resistance from specific leadership cohorts
 - Equity concerns in particular departments or functions
 - Challenges in specific systems (hiring, promotion, compensation)
 - Conflicts between different equity priorities or stakeholder groups
 - Implementation failures of previous equity initiatives
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Leadership Training Experiences

Intensive developmental experiences that transform how leaders understand and exercise power:

- Simulations and case studies that reveal power dynamics
- Personal reflection on leaders' own relationship to power and privilege
- Skill-building in inclusive leadership practices
- Peer learning among leaders navigating similar challenges
- Action planning for leading equity change in specific organizational contexts

From Blueprint to Reality

The Organizational Development Blueprint described in brevity here represents a fundamental reconceptualization of how equity work unfolds in organizational settings. Rather than treating equity as a problem to be solved through training and policies, it recognizes equity as an ongoing practice of transforming power relationships, and understands that equity work is **complex, iterative, relational, and contextual**.

Most importantly, this blueprint recognizes that equity work is ultimately about power - who has it, how it operates, and how it might be transformed to create more just organizations. By making power visible and amenable to intentional redesign, organizations can move beyond the frustrating cycle of initiative after initiative that changes little. They can instead engage in the deeper, harder, more sustainable work of transformation.

For organizations ready to move beyond performative equity toward genuine transformation, this blueprint offers both a map and a compass. The journey will be challenging. The destination - organizations that genuinely embody equity in their structures, cultures, and impacts - is worth the effort.

For inquiries about implementing this framework or accessing support services, contact:

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