

Inclusive Leadership

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INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP: EQUITY AND BELONGING IN OUR COMMUNITIES

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

To the countless individuals who inspire us every day with their unwavering commitment to fostering a world that embraces diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging – this is dedicated to you. We hope that the collective wisdom, experiences, and insights presented within these pages will ignite meaningful conversations and empower and guide the next generation of scholars, practitioners, and advocates as they work to create a more just and inclusive society.

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Foreword

It is often tempting to proclaim, “We’ve come a long way,” but the persistent challenges faced by historically underrepresented and marginalized individuals tell a different story. In a world where not everyone is granted equal opportunities and the “just keep trying” mantra persists, there remains an urgent need to practice and understand diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB).

Some may argue that in our globalized world, we already champion and comprehend diversity. They may further note that women lead countries, as exemplified in *Time*’s 2022 publication featuring 13 accomplished female leaders. However, we must also confront the harsh reality of those facing exclusion and a lack of opportunity and belonging in their chosen professions. It is disheartening that despite Juneteenth being recognized as a federal holiday in the United States, numerous institutions of higher learning and businesses fail to grasp the significance of this date. This raises the question we fear facing: Are we all truly free?

We must not only acknowledge the multiple ethnic and racial groups that enrich our cultures but also wholeheartedly seek to understand and embrace the diversity of identities, generations, sexual orientations, religious beliefs, and more across our communities, workplaces, and learning institutions. Each individual brings immeasurable value to the workforce and society, and we must actively listen to their stories and unite to find meaningful solutions to the world’s pressing challenges.

This book you hold in your hands, *Inclusive Leadership: Equity and Belonging in Our Communities*, serves as a guide to what it means and looks like to be an ally and advocate for DEIB. Divided into four parts – (a) Understanding Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging, (b) Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Belonging, and Education, (c) The Application and Practice of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging/Accessibility, and (d) Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Belonging/Accessibility: A Community and Global Perspective – this book offers readers a roadmap toward fostering inclusivity and fairness.

I know that the editors and authors of this book sincerely hope that the chapters contained within illuminate the path for you, your leadership, and all who seek to prioritize and implement DEIB principles for the betterment of society as a whole. We can collectively build a more just and harmonious world by embracing DEIB. Let us embark on this transformative journey together.

— Daisy Auger-Domínguez

Author of *Inclusion Revolution: The Essential Guide to Dismantling Racial Inequity in the Workplace* and Chief People Officer at Vice Media

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Finally, we wish to acknowledge everyone who responded to our request for chapter proposals for being willing to share their experiences and best ideas. Regardless of whether their chapters were included, these individuals represent an illustration of the larger, worldwide group of dedicated and generous people who are engaged in this important work.

Introduction

The Multifaceted World of Leading Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Belonging, and Accessibility

*Joanne Barnes, Michael J. Stevens, Bjørn Zakarias Ekelund and
Karen Perham-Lippman*

“Our ability to reach unity in diversity will be the beauty and the test of our civilization.”

—Mahatma Gandhi

It seems we can find, almost daily, increasing calls in public life to minimize – and even unwind – the hard-fought gains that have been achieved by fostering greater diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging, and accessibility (DEIBA). The need for a more thoughtful, nuanced, and insightful approach to inclusive leadership thus appears to grow more urgent by the day. By pulling together a broad and comprehensive collection of perspectives, this book is our attempt to address this need. Expanding on two successful International Leadership Association (ILA) Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Virtual Summits, this book answers the call for greater awareness, advocacy, action, and transformation for inclusive leadership, while bringing a global perspective to bear on the intersectionality of the different components of the DEIBA space.

Through the results of a rigorous and competitive review process, we share the final selected chapters in this book, which come from an array of academic researchers, educators, organizational leaders, nonprofit scholars, development and consulting professionals, and others. If the number of submissions we received in response to our call for proposed chapters is an indication of the enthusiasm for this work, we are filled with optimism.

The chapters in this book are organized into four parts, each dedicated to helping leaders better understand and advance DEIBA initiatives and applications. Our goal in presenting this collection is to provide a practical book that helps improve not only how we conceptualize and think about the DEIBA space but also to provide tools and case studies to help guide the practice of inclusive leadership.

When authentic and mutually respectful DEIBA are leveraged to advance a shared common purpose, we can see amazing things happen – everyone connected to an enterprise is far more likely to wrap their “hearts, minds, and souls” around a shared mission and vision. Though not an easy task, we have seen

firsthand that it is possible to leverage our collective differences to build creativity, innovation, and enduring organizations – not despite but precisely because of our differences. As the editors of this volume, we are committed to developing a robust and rigorous DEIBA mindset that can both inform our core values and self-identity as leaders, while also serve as the foundation for a steadfast commitment to strengthening “our universal web of interconnected human dignity” (Martin Luther King Jr, Letter from Birmingham Jail). We invite readers to join us on this journey.

— Joanne Barnes
— Michael J. Stevens
— Bjørn Zakarias Ekelund
— Karen Perham-Lippman

Part One

**Understanding Diversity, Equity, Inclusion,
and Belonging**

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Chapter 1

Shared Equity Leadership: A New Model for Making Inclusion and Equity Part of Organizational Culture

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University of Southern California, USA

Abstract

This chapter describes a new leadership model called shared equity leadership (SEL). The goal of SEL is to create culture change that embeds shared values of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) into the core of an organization. SEL emerged from a qualitative multiple-case study of leaders who were committed to establishing an equitable organization at eight colleges and universities that had seen success in their equity efforts. We reviewed over 1,000 pages of documents and interviewed 126 leaders, including cabinet-level executives, mid-level leaders, and group-level leaders. While we identified this model on college campuses, it has relevance for any organizational context. SEL entails three elements: (1) a personal journey toward critical consciousness in which leaders solidify their commitment to equity, (2) a set of values that center equity and guide the work, and (3) a set of practices that leaders enact collectively to change inequitable structures. Distinct from traditional leadership models, SEL encompasses both personal and organizational processes of leadership and emphasizes collaborative, relational, personal, and emotional aspects of leadership. This change starts with transforming awareness and behaviors of individuals, who engage in personal journeys toward critical consciousness and develop an urgent sense of responsibility for creating change. Organizations can facilitate their personal journeys and begin structuring SEL by forming a diverse team and socializing

them into SEL expectations. With a concerted effort of leaders committed to SEL values and practices, an organization can be transformed so that equity is everyone's work.

Keywords: Equity; leadership; organizational change; organizational culture; systemic inequities; higher education

DEI is an increasing priority for organizational leaders. Responding to the concerns of the historically marginalized groups related to systemic inequities, corporations, public sectors, colleges, and universities have been trying to create more inclusive and equitable work environments and outcomes for employees and those whom they serve. These efforts include making public statements to denounce violence and discrimination, developing DEI strategic plans and goals, and implementing identity-conscious recruitment, hiring, and promotion practices. To advance DEI goals, an organization typically assigns DEI responsibility to a single office or a specific person responsible for all DEI-related programs. However, such a DEI office or manager is often isolated from other parts of an organization and mainstream operation (Dobbin & Kalev, 2007). Being siloed from day-to-day work of employees and organizational decision-making, the DEI office and manager have limited influence and authority to implement DEI strategies. Under the structure, employees and organizational leaders tend to think that DEI is not their responsibility and continue working "as usual" without noticing how the "usual" is creating inequity. Isolating DEI initiatives does not seem to work well. How, then, can DEI initiatives be implemented more comprehensively across an organization? What does it take for organizational leaders to make it possible? In this chapter, we propose a new leadership model called SEL, which answers those questions.

SEL emerged from our recent research of leaders at eight colleges and universities in the United States who were committed to establishing an equitable organization. The goal of SEL is to create culture change that embeds shared values of equity into the core of an organization. SEL dismantles inequitable organizational structures and creates equitable conditions and outcomes for minoritized groups of people. We define SEL as *a collaborative process where leaders work together to instantiate both personal and organizational transformation, contributing to a change in organizational culture in which equity becomes everyone's work rather than siloed in a single office or leader's purview*. While we identified this model on college campuses, it has relevance for any organizational context. This chapter is organized as follows. First, we describe the research project that leads to the SEL model development. Second, we describe the model and its three main elements: personal journey toward critical consciousness, values, and practices. Finally, we provide important considerations for implementing SEL.

SEL Research Project

A team of researchers at the Pullias Center for Higher Education (Pullias) and American Council on Education (ACE) jointly launched the SEL project in 2019.

The Pullias and ACE leaders met to discuss current DEI issues on college campuses, in particular, the sluggish changes toward equity and how many ineffective DEI efforts are siloed in a single office and disconnected from broader organizational priorities. Brainstorming possible approaches that might shift this trend by reviewing literature (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017) and talking to campus leaders, the team theorized that *culture change* is necessary to dismantle inequitable structures, and leadership is crucial in driving this change.

This project was a qualitative multiple-case study featuring 126 leaders at eight institutions engaging in DEI efforts. We selected participating institutions that met two criteria: (1) an institution had strong evidence of advancing a DEI agenda and (2) a wide range of campus stakeholders were participating in a shared form of leadership. The selected institutions were Foothill College, Montana State University, Penn State–Abington, Rutgers University–Newark, Texas A&M University–San Antonio, University of Michigan, University of Richmond, and Westchester Community College. These institutions vary in their institutional types (public and private, research universities, regional comprehensive institutions, community colleges, liberal arts colleges, and minority serving institutions), location (rural, urban, and suburban), state-level political contexts, and presence/absence of race-conscious policies. Despite the variance in institutional characteristics, we found consistent patterns that defined the SEL model across institutions.

Within the selected institutions, we reviewed over 1,000 pages of documents and conducted 126 interviews. Documents included strategic plans, reports, summaries of key meetings, presidential communications about DEI work, and other publicly unavailable information that we obtained from a campus liaison at each site. Interviewees included cabinet-level executives, such as provosts and presidents, and mid-level leaders, such as department chairs, associate deans, unit heads, as well as ground-level leaders, such as faculty members and staff. The large amount of qualitative data helped paint a rich picture of why these campuses had seen success in their equity efforts and how they were doing it – an approach we termed SEL.

SEL Model

In the SEL model, a greater number of individuals in various roles and positions are involved in leadership to advance equity, share the responsibilities of contributing to organizational change, and work together across organizational divisions and varying personal backgrounds. In our multiple-case study, we found examples of leaders working collaboratively across departments and levels of the hierarchy, from front-line staff to mid-level leaders to senior-level leaders. The model also brings together leaders' diverse perspectives, experiences, and expertise. A shared leadership approach taps into the collective capacity latent within an organization and maximizes the breadth and depth of its impact to advance equity.

SEL involves personal and organizational transformation, which are both essential for promoting lasting cultural change. Personal transformation involves the process of individuals learning to understand the structural nature of inequity, deepening their own personal commitment to equity, and taking actions to create changes. By organizational transformation, we mean that an organization transforms its long-existing norms, structures, processes, practices, and policies

that privilege certain groups over others and maintain the inequitable status quo. New structures that center equity help instantiate new norms and values across the organization. Personal and organizational transformation reinforces each other. As more leaders grow to be equity-minded and learn to work collectively, the force for change toward equity increases, which drives organizational transformation. As organizations transform to establish new policies and practices that support equity work, individuals gain more resources and opportunities to increase understanding of systemic inequity, develop capacity to create change, and feel supported to do equity work.

The SEL model (Fig. 1.1) entails three main elements: (1) a *personal journey toward critical consciousness* in which leaders solidify their commitment to equity, (2) a set of *values* that center equity and guide the work, and (3) a set of *practices* that leaders enact collectively to change inequitable structures (Kezar et al., 2021). There are 8 values and 17 practices. However, every individual does not have to have every value and practice. In fact, few of the leaders we interviewed possess skills in all areas. Rather, we want to bring a range of expertise or skills from diverse individuals by distributing leadership throughout an organization. With a wider range of skills, experiences, knowledge, and perspectives, we can enact more of the SEL values and practices, which can create a broader and deeper organizational change.

Personal Journey Toward Critical Consciousness

A *personal journey toward critical consciousness* is at the heart of SEL. Leaders must first turn inward to turn outward and commit to transform their organizations. This internal effort involves learning about systemic and historical inequities, reflecting on how one’s own identity and experience are related to the inequities, and contemplating one’s own role in creating change. This journey could occur in different ways depending on leaders’ identities and backgrounds. For example, leaders with marginalized identities develop personal commitment to equity work

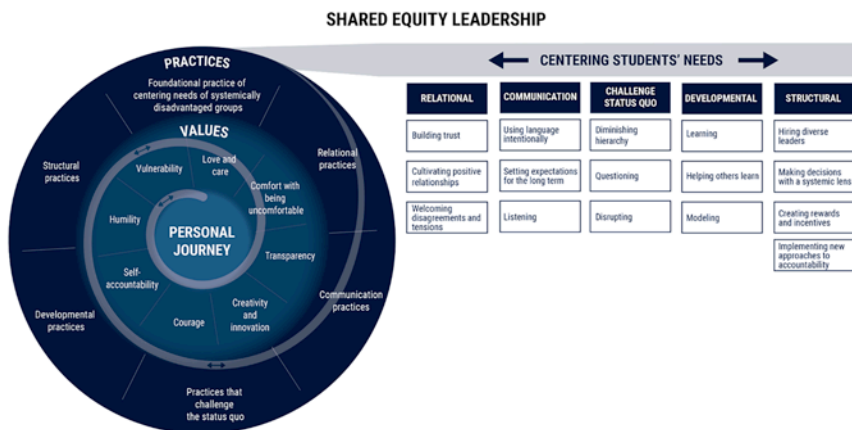


Fig. 1.1. SEL Model. *Source:* Personal Journey Toward Critical Consciousness, © The ACE and Pullias Center for Higher Education.

because they have experienced discrimination in the past. For others with a dominant identity (i.e., White), equity work becomes personal when they experience exclusion based on one of their marginalized identities (i.e., sexual minority). Those who do not recall any experiences of discrimination come to personally commit to equity work through learning about the history or others' lived experiences.

While equity leaders can have different courses of journeys, what is common is that they develop critical understanding of systemic inequities and realize their own role in creating change. They become more aware of how they are negatively impacted by the system and, at the same time, contributing to inequity and injustice. With that realization, DEI issues become personal to them, and they develop a greater sense of responsibility and commitment to creating a new and equitable structure. When the number of leaders who are awakened to such a responsibility reaches a critical mass, it becomes possible to set an organizational priority for equity. In such an organization, a group of equity-minded leaders comes together to implement a new set of SEL values and practices that transforms an organization to be a more equitable place.

Values

The second element of the SEL model is *values*, which are the beliefs and ideals shared among leaders. The values represent a way of being, showing up, and relating to others as a leader. Individual leaders learn to embody the values of SEL through leaders' personal commitment to equity and working collaboratively with others. Some of the SEL values are markedly different from traditional notions of leadership that emphasize hierarchy, authority, and individual traits and abilities. In contrast to the values underlying traditional leadership approaches, SEL values emphasize collaborative and relational processes, such as transparency and comfort with being uncomfortable, as well as personal, emotional aspects of leadership, such as love and care, courage, humility, and vulnerability. [Table 1.1](#) presents descriptions of all nine SEL values. These values guide the SEL practices.

Practices

SEL *practices* represent new ways of acting that are oriented toward challenging inequities and creating new structures and policies. By practices, we mean the ongoing, regular activities that leaders perform both individually and collectively to advance an equity agenda. We identified 17 practices and categorized them into 6 domains, including fundamental practices of centering the needs of systematically marginalized communities, relational practices, communication practices, developmental practices, practices that challenge the status quo, and structural practices. Relational and communication practices suggest effective ways of working with others and across differences. Developmental practices build knowledge and skills and foster people's capacity to do equity work. Practices that challenge the status quo guide leaders to call out the entrenched policies and practices that reproduce inequities, while actively working to dismantle them. Structural practices support leaders in implementing concrete changes to organizational structures and culture. [Table 1.2](#) presents the descriptions of all the SEL practices.

Table 1.1. Descriptions of SEL Values.

Love and care	An ethos of love and care underscores the personal nature of SEL. Leaders feel and display love and care for those with whom they are working. They approach any relationship with a deep sense of caring and compassion, even if they tend to disagree or have had contrasting experiences
Comfort with being uncomfortable	Equity work sometimes requires leaders to sit with the emotions and pains of others uncomfortably rather than immediately finding solutions. It is important for leaders to be comfortable with such feelings of discomfort
Transparency	A value of transparency means that leaders are honest, clear, and open about decision-making, successes, failures, and challenges of their work
Creativity and imagination	Creativity and imagination are necessary because there are no universally agreed-upon ways of doing equity work
Courage	Courage for shared equity leaders means standing up for equity even when it's not popular or easy and remaining dedicated in the face of resistance or skepticism
Self-accountability	Leaders who have self-accountability hold themselves accountable for doing the work, getting results, learning about equity, and challenging their preconceived notions. They are also willing to change their beliefs and practices as they continue to learn and grow.
Humility	Humility for shared equity leaders means to admit when they have done something wrong or when something has not worked well. They understand that they do not have all the answers or solutions, their experience isn't everyone's experience, and they have things to learn from other people
Vulnerability	Vulnerability in SEL means being able to be open about difficult personal experiences or being willing to risk exposing their true selves, even without knowing exactly how they will be received. These vulnerable experiences are often related to race or other aspects of identity and can be painful to share. Being vulnerable helps leaders build connections, trust one another, and better understand others' perspectives and experiences
