PATHWAYS AND TOOLS TO NAVIGATE AN EQUITY LEARNING JOURNEY
Refugee Support Sector Version

Introduction

An Equity Learning Journey centers access, identity, and strengths in order to support meaningful inclusion and participation in leadership and decision-making for people who have experienced forced displacement. Such a journey has to involve an understanding of historical, systemic and structural barriers, and a redistribution of power in a culturally responsive/intelligent way.

When planning for an organizational equity learning journey, and depending on where an organization may fall in the depth of its learning on inclusion, equity, and justice, there are several pathways that can help navigate the journey effectively and collectively. We listed three main pathways below. While the pathways listed might state that they are primarily aimed to support an organization at a particular point in the journey, each pathway assumes an organization's commitment to take this journey and its recognition of "why" this is an essential journey to further its impact.

Pathway 1: Assess Organizational Mindset and Practices

When an organization is curious about an equity learning journey

1) Overall approach:

   Dig into the identity of the organization, the vision, mission, and values that are driving the organization. Ask some of these questions:

   a) How are the vision, mission, and values of our organization being understood, embodied, and practiced by various leaders and cultural groups?

   b) Have we identified equity, inclusion and justice as core values and drivers?

   c) How does each department/function and group within our organization perceive the values and the vision?

   d) Where do various people see themselves in the vision?

   e) Does everyone understand the impact if we do not realize equity?

2) Perceived Challenges and Mitigation Strategies:

   ■ When the challenge we are facing is that we don't know where to start, even if driven and curious towards equity, an assessment might help. It is implicitly saying that this is important and we want to do something about it together. The assessment itself is a start. Assessments help with creating heightened awareness and that can help us harness additional support as a result of the visibility that equity is getting.

   ■ A key piece is not to treat the assessment like a test or evaluation. Educating and coaching while assessing is also very important. Level-setting understanding of various terms and nuances of the topic of DEIB, the "isms" and meaningful participation vs. meaningful inclusion, perceptions of leadership, and speaking to several cultural dynamics can make a difference in how we start this journey. Part of centering identity is to also be mindful of all

lived experiences and of cultural dynamics around collectivism, risk aversion, expressiveness, direct communication and indirect communication, etc.

3) Impact of this pathway:
   - With an external expert and bypassing silos of information that may have existed, we can begin seeing where to target efforts for action, prioritize next steps, and identify gaps in communication and the systems in place that may become barriers for moving forward.
   - The assessment can help us design the measurements we will be utilizing to meet the outcomes we are seeking. Instead of focusing only on diversity/representation data, we can design data points to support the outcomes of meaningful participation in decision-making, for example.
   - Recognizing where we are and developing measurements for where we want to be can help us overcome the difficulty we may be having in planning where to start the learning journey.

Pathway 2: Harness Support and Develop champions, and in all localities

When an organization is discovering and developing the journey

1) Overall Approach:
   a) Having done an assessment helps us to learn how people within the organization and external to the organization perceive the vision. After planning a strategy for our equity journey, we can start enlisting supporters at various levels, internal and external.
      - Identify who are the key people who need to be involved, from their function and role and from what they have expressed as their career goals and desires for participation.
   b) How assessment findings are presented and how the topic is discussed needs to be where we are speaking to different priorities and avoiding blame or guilt-tripping, so that we can build trust in the process and the outcomes. We would be providing the information to have everyone take agency for implementing the changes. We might have a tendency to over-evaluate our impact and feel defensive/criticized, and how we talk about what we discovered makes an impact on the trust among various groups.
   c) There has to be extrinsic interest, a motivation, beyond the intrinsic joy that comes from this, for each leader and stakeholder. It could be for their reputation, their legacy, for the effective use of their time, for the agility that they could perceive in their organization, etc.
      - We would gauge which leaders might feel that they need to have a coach to support them and recognize that people are at different points in the learning and understanding of this topic.

- Dedicating a budget for coaching for each top leader and ensuring that they have a coach to support them in the process can make a big difference.
  - d) Localizing the journey is essential for this step. What works for one office/region might not work for another. It has to come from within and be led from within those localities.

2) Perceived Challenges and Mitigation Strategies:
   - Equity and inclusion, and DEIB in general, can be misperceived as "extra" or not core to business objectives. We can mitigate the negative impact of this perception by appealing to the connection between core organizational objectives and the expected outcomes of the journey: How does this connect to the career pathway of everyone and the growth of the organization and sector itself? What does it mean for someone's role in the organization and how can it be adapted?
   - Part of this journey is working as a collective to get unstuck from the mindset that remaining in a particular role is the definition of success, when we can shift our lens to the impact we could have and the legacy we want to leave behind, regardless of our title.
     - If those in positions of influence and power do not see the vision and they can't make sense of it for their career pathway, then we are forced to ask if they are still a good match to the organization. If we are hiring them for a job at this moment in time, we would find that they do not match/align with what we are seeking. Maybe it is ok to let them transition, if they feel compelled to do so, and still find a way to support them in how they perceive success.
   - Fragility around whiteness, socio-economic status, nationality, and other identities and misunderstanding of what DEIB actually means can also be barriers to moving forward. The equity discussion should not only focus on identity but also on allyship and on belonging for everyone: the idea of " what does this mean for me?" Working to answer these questions can help, and the answer has to be clear and it has to be where each concerned person can develop it for themselves.
     - What does it mean for my role, and how can I look at this as a responsibility to doing my job effectively?
     - How have I already benefited from the advantages and statuses I have had?
     - What does this mean for dominant cultures or those who have not experienced forced displacement? Where is their place?
     - How can I not see allyship as a personal threat?

- Can I see it as something that can lead me to grow and redefine how success looks like to me, the bigger impact I can make?

3) Impact of this pathway:
- Leaders across the regions would endorse the efforts we are developing, enabling the champions and change agents to move forward
- Easier to secure funding effectively and more efficiently when we know our vision and what we are working to sustain
- The learning journey is contextualized for all the relevant cultural, identity, and power dynamics challenges, allowing us to have agility for any unexpected events or sector developments.

Pathway 3: Strengthen engagement and drivers for continuation

When an organization is seeking to sustain the journey

1) Overall Approach:
   a) With any change, we can find that some people are more excited than others. The assessment we completed as an organization, beyond helping us to identify champions, can also help us identify the "why" of various people and how to reach them. This supports us to keep folks engaged and able to sustain through challenges.
   b) The focus is on continuing to build trust: It's a mindset to recognize that we are seeking to do the things we are doing regularly, only differently and more consistently. It is doing more of the same, but with bigger impact and with an emphasis on fairness and conscientious responsibility by everyone.
   c) Visions are not there only to be achieved at any cost, but also to serve as guide points for the mini-goals we will be setting along the way. The journey we take can make a huge difference in how we can sustain. We want to avoid tokenizing and we want this to be perceived as everyone's journey, together as a collective.

2) Perceived Challenges and Mitigation Strategies:
- Sometimes on the path to equity, it can feel like we are repeating ourselves, wheel spinning and reverting to routine, albeit inadvertently at times. We would need to put guardrails and beacons for everyone to see the journey changes, pulsing along the way to know where to keep doing what we are doing, where to shift focus, what to stop doing, etc. More importantly, for any feedback we receive, we need to explore how to implement it, otherwise we lose the interest and trust.
- The staff and leaders need to own the journey using the tools co-created with a consultant, initially, and then they need to integrate it into the operations of the organization, meaning each department needs to set their own ways that they will infuse equity into what they are doing, including specific goals for their department.

- Creating opportunities for employees to continue learning can be challenging, but it is essential to carry it forward after the focused training program is completed. We need to put the newly gained skills into action. We would need to utilize the technologies in place, the communication forums available, creating continuous learning communities and task forces that keep action going, and on a rotating basis. Here are a few examples:
    - Planning additional follow-up
    - Providing access to learning platforms based on various localities capabilities
    - Creating internal growth partnership/mentorship programs, resource/affinity groups
    - Creating and assigning experimental projects
    - Creating learning communities (experts-in-residence on various topics), asking employees to share their new knowledge with their teams
    - Launching one-to-one coaching programs.
    - Acknowledging and redefining new ways of working at the individual level (HR, operations, communication, advocacy).
    - Implementing changes in hiring, recruitment, onboarding, etc. in order to adjust demographics to reflect those we serve
    - Changes to career pathways and how we equip people for growing within the organization, being promoted, holding positions of leadership–recognizing different facets and styles of leadership.
    - Policy changes to support various minoritized groups.
    - Changes to who represents the org, or how it is represented (communication – internal and external – and ambassadorship)
    - Changes to the programs themselves – more equitable approaches with constituents and partners, centering identity and redistributing power
3) Impact of this strategy:
    - Clarity on the steps needed for effective meaningful refugee representation and leadership strategy, so that it is a long term, effective, integrated part of how we operate and grow
    - Accountability of allies and a reiteration of the agency we all have to implement this on an individual and a collective/organizational level
    - A roadmap to keep this going and into realistic action at all levels of the organization, and where it makes sense for our organizational objectives