

Alignment/realignment: *Walking the walk*

Progress on equity can't be made if systems, practices, and resources aren't aligned with equity goals. And alignment won't happen unless we check in regularly and ask, "How are we doing?"

It's a constant process, kind of like balance. Balancing is sort of like the body continuously asking "how am I doing?" and listening carefully and holistically to take in new information and use it. It's just being off balance and adjusting—in the same way that walking (or walking the walk) is just falling and catching yourself. Rigidity and stillness are not helpful. What's needed is a relaxed responsiveness—and courage.

An organization needs to be a living thing too, courageously stepping forward and continually responsive to new insights and changing conditions. We're all learning all the time as we walk the walk. And as our understanding of the human reality in front of us deepens, our practice of catching ourselves and moving forward can become more dancery.

Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.

—Maya Angelou

Guiding/Coaching Questions:

- How is organizational culture (beliefs, identity, values) an honest and visible part of the conversation around selecting strategic actions and improvements?
- How are decisions about improvement strategies transparent and trust-building?
- How do norms, working agreements, systems, structures, and processes support you in acting in ways that are aligned to your values and beliefs?
- How regularly do you examine goals, projects, processes, and structures to make sure they reflect your grounding values? What do you do if you find misalignment?
- If your organization determines that improvement strategies aren't being implemented as intended, what steps are in place to support you to get back on track?
- How do you review, with stakeholders, the possible unintended consequences of a proposed action or change? How do you ensure you address concerns?

Sample Practices:

- Define indicators of misalignment to make identifying it easier. (If something wasn't quite aligned, what might you see happening?) Indicators might include low morale, confusion, lack of coherence, rigidity, lack of stakeholder engagement, poor communication, silos, unnecessary complication of processes, etc.
- Co-create team norms that align to your values, beliefs and equity vision, and use supports like protocols to inject them into the work.
- Partner across internal boundaries and with external stakeholders to assess and realign, taking advantage of multiple perspectives on the work.
- Periodically update the vision and norms so new employees can have a voice and staff as a whole can reinvest.
- Track how you spend your time for a week and match it to your values and goals. Are the most important things getting the most attention?
- Ask, "what can we stop doing?"

Common Pitfalls

- Doing things because, "That's the way we've always done it!"
- Establishing an equity vision, mission, and priorities, but not intentionally and consistently integrating them into the work of the organization
- Developing processes and systems informally rather than deliberately, with alignment in mind
- Monitoring individual employee performance but not progress as a group or organization on larger goals
- Not allowing staff enough time to manage and plan, and measuring productivity but not progress
- Accountability only runs one way—those "lower" are accountable to those "higher;" lack of feedback loops

Resources & Points of Connection

- [TRIZ, an alignment exercise to identify counterproductive activities and open up room for innovation](#)
- [DPI's EMLSS model](#): strategic use of data, family and community engagement, collaboration, strong shared leadership
- [DPI's Model to Inform Culturally Responsive Practice](#): become self-aware; examine the impact of systems, structures, policies, and practices on learners and families; lead, model, and advocate for equity; accept the responsibility for learner success
- [Blase, K. A., Fixsen, D. L., Sims, B. J., & Ward, C. S. \(2015\). Implementation science: Changing hearts, minds, behavior, and systems to improve educational outcomes. Oakland, CA: The Wing Institute. <https://fpg.unc.edu/node/7729>](#)