



The Change Leadership Toolkit (CLT) and Shared Equity Leadership (SEL)

**Guidance for Using These Two Change
Leadership Models Together**

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Introduction

The **Pullias Center for Higher Education** at the University of Southern California's Rossier School of Education has been at the forefront of studying change and leadership in higher education. Two frameworks of change leadership developed by Pullias Center scholars and affiliates have complementary perspectives — the Change Leadership Toolkit (CLT) and Shared Equity Leadership (SEL). These models are distinct yet complementary — both support leaders making meaningful changes, but they do so differently and are informed by unique research and assumptions. This guide is intended as a key — or translation guide — for leaders interested in using one or both models to inform their change leadership agenda. It will explain each model, describe the different reports and tools available for each model, and highlight similarities and differences across the CLT and SEL. It will also demonstrate how leaders using SEL can bring in concepts and activities from the CLT to inform their work, and vice versa. This guide is broken up into the following sections:

1.
Overview of the Two Change Leadership Models
2.
Comparing SEL and the CLT
3.
Using the Two Models Together
4.
Conclusion

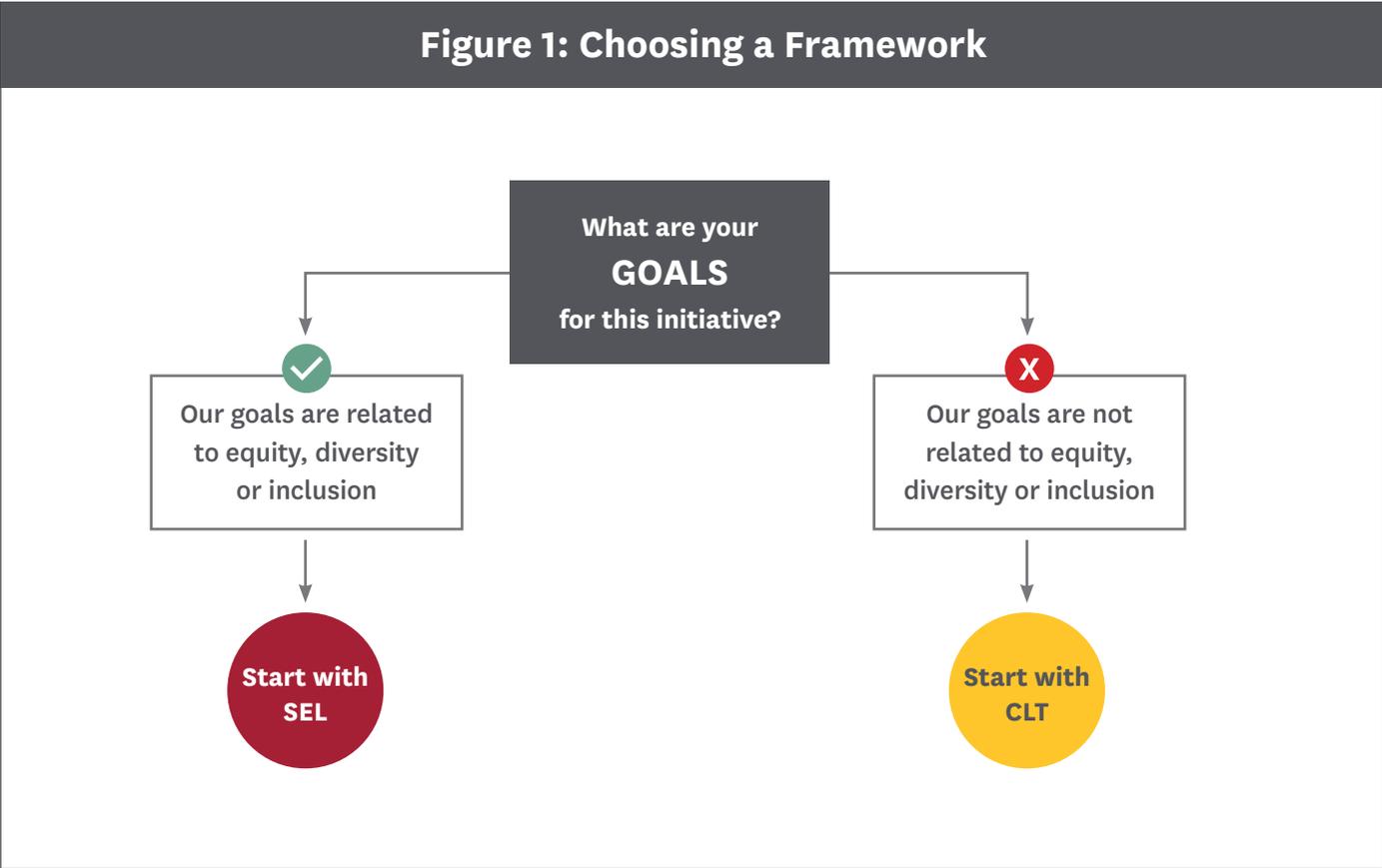


**This guide is intended
as a key — or translation
guide — for leaders interested
in using one or both models
to inform their change
leadership agenda.**

How to Get Started if you aren't Using Either Framework

If you are embarking on a change project on your campus and are interested in using the CLT and/or SEL but don't know where to start, the most important place to start is with your goals.

- +** **If your primary goal is equity and inclusion work:** start with SEL, which is designed explicitly for equity-focused transformation.
- ...** **If you're pursuing other types of systemic change:** start with CLT, which supports any systemic change effort.
- ?** **If you are unsure of your focus:** start with CLT, whose general framework will help you clarify your goals.



Section 1

Overview of the Two Change Leadership Models

Shared Equity Leadership (SEL) is based on a multiple-case study of eight college and university campuses that were making progress on closing equity gaps and meeting equity goals from 2019-2021. The study was part of a research-practice partnership with the American Council on Education (ACE). The purpose of the study was to understand what leaders on these campuses were doing to advance diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) work and how they were working collaboratively across campus to create change. Despite the differences in the campuses we studied (two-year and four-year, public and private, all regions of the country), we found that they were all doing something quite similar — sharing or distributing leadership for equity work broadly across the institution, an approach we came to call Shared Equity Leadership. SEL is a leadership approach that embeds equity work throughout the institution and creates culture change by connecting individual and organizational transformation.

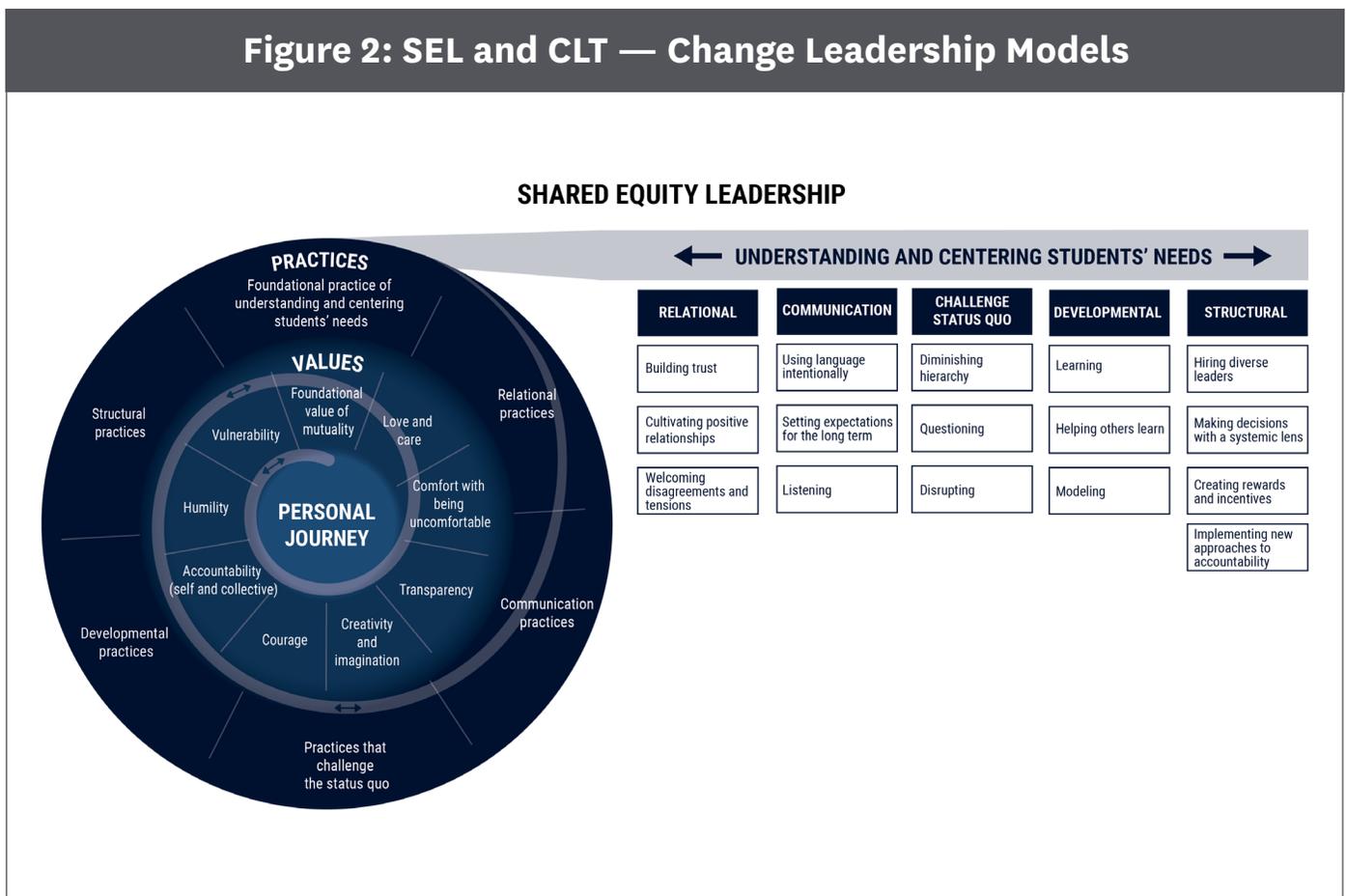
SEL is about doing the work in new and different ways through new practices, but also about showing up to the work differently with new values, and engaging personally in the work through the personal journey. SEL is focused on the process of sharing leadership for equity, and the model explains what it looks like when this approach is already underway. The SEL research team has published seven reports, a toolkit, several practice briefs, and four journal articles on various aspects of the SEL model. Its insights have informed both scholarly research and leader practice on college and university campuses. SEL is a useful approach for leaders who are interested in making changes on their campus that advance equity and dismantle inequitable systems and structures.

The Change Leadership Toolkit (CLT) was developed by the Pullias Center for Higher Education through interviews and focus groups with hundreds of leaders across the country who have led systemic change on their campuses or in their organizations. The project was designed to evaluate what successful change leaders did to create the meaningful, long-lasting, systemic change that stakeholders have advocated for in higher education for the last several decades. The research identified a set of actions or “moves” that leaders make to drive systemic change, and also identified the importance of leadership context in shaping the moves that leaders make and providing opportunities or barriers to the change process.

Additionally, these leaders were adept at identifying and using “levers” to accelerate the progress of their desired change. From these three components (moves, context and levers) the project team created the Ecosystem Model of Systemic Change Leadership to explain how systemic change happens within a broader ecosystem and guides leaders through better understanding their own ecosystems. This approach was developed and tested across all institutional types and leaders including faculty, staff and administrators. The CLT, first published in 2023 with a **revised and updated version in 2024**, is an action-oriented toolkit that describes the Ecosystem Model of Systemic Change Leadership in detail and provides a set of worksheets that support leaders in understanding their ecosystem and planning for change. The CLT

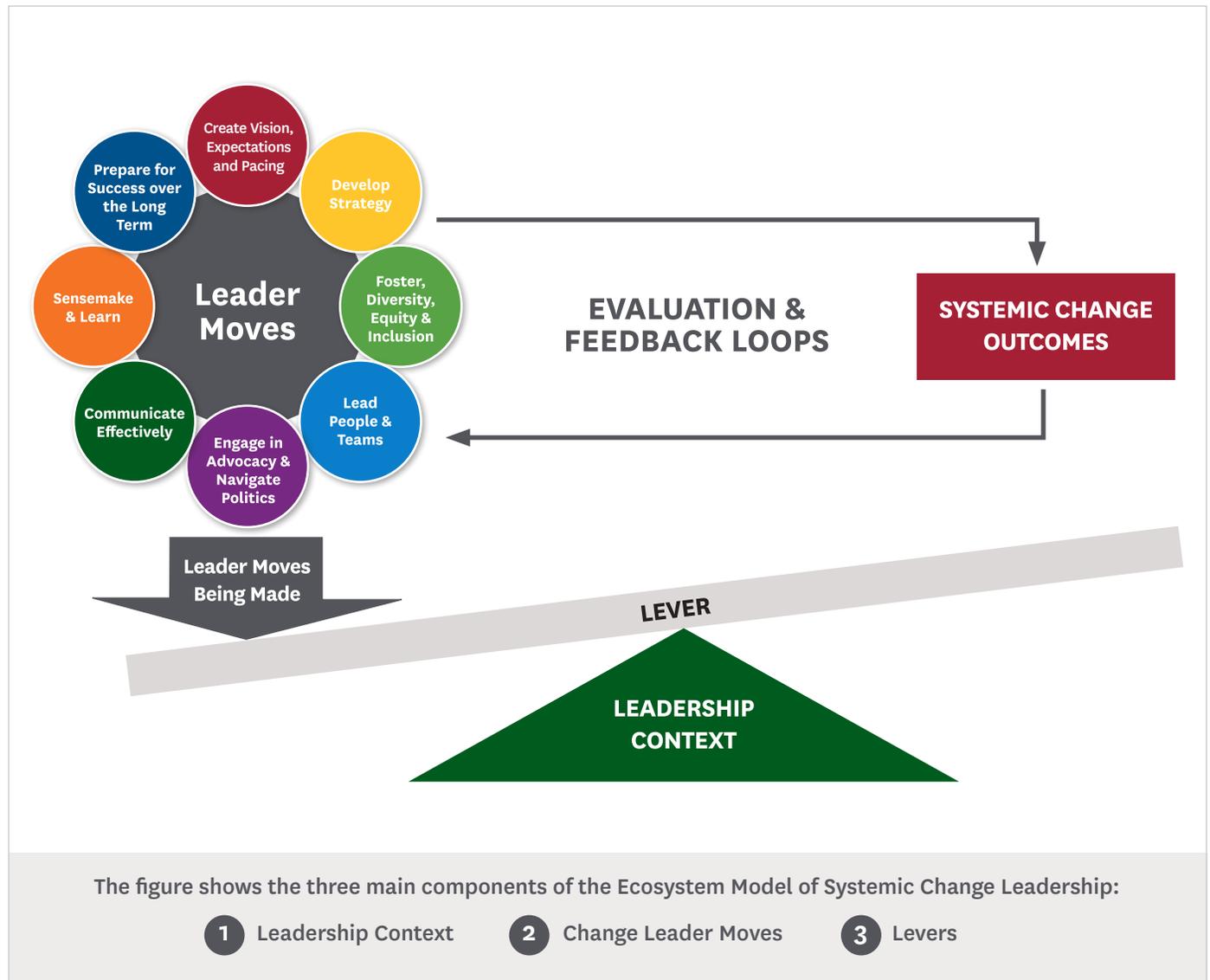
project team has also used the CLT to create a professional development curriculum for leadership teams as they work through systemic change, and more than a dozen campuses have already used the curriculum. The CLT is a useful tool for leaders who are taking charge of any type of systemic change that works across multiple departments or divisions and changes policies, practices or structures.

Figure 2 below and continued on the next page shows visual depictions of each of the change leadership models and a brief description of each. The next section of this guidebook compares the two models in more detail.



Shared Equity Leadership (SEL) is a leadership approach that embeds equity work throughout the institution and creates culture change by connecting individual and organizational transformation. Individuals embrace a personal journey toward critical consciousness to become a different type of leader, and leaders collectively embody new values and enact a set of practices that form new relationships and understandings, ultimately working to dismantle current systems and structures that inhibit equitable outcomes and create a new equitable culture.

The Change Leadership Toolkit (CLT)'s Ecosystem Model of Systemic Change Leadership conceptualizes change leadership as a series of leader actions or moves that leaders make collectively, occurring within a unique leadership context. Leaders can utilize levers or opportunities from their context to help accelerate or advance their change.



Section 2

Comparing SEL and the CLT

SEL and the CLT share similarities on several dimensions, as shown in Figure 2. Both are process-oriented leadership approaches rather than person-focused approaches. Instead of setting forth traits or characteristics necessary for leaders to create change, process-oriented leadership models clearly describe how leadership is a process of influencing others to act in certain ways that drive change. Process models also focus on the environment and context as meaningful to shaping change; organizational structures and processes as key focal points to enable or restrict changes; and the interactions of people and organizational systems as bidirectional with people altering behaviors, policies and/or structures. Similarly, both models are team or collective approaches to leadership premised on leadership as a collective process of mutual influence rather than a top-down exercise of power over others. In both models, leadership can come from anywhere in the organization (faculty, staff, even students), not just senior leaders. Additionally, both models focus on the actions that leaders can take to make change. In the SEL model these actions are called “Practices,” and there are six categories of related practices. The CLT calls these actions “Moves,” and there are eight categories of moves. For more details about each SEL practice, please see [this report](#). For more details about the leader moves, please see [the CLT](#).

Figure 3: Similarities Between SEL and CLT



There is also a clear overlap between the SEL Practices and the CLT Moves in four key areas. The SEL Relational Practices (building trust, cultivating positive relationships, welcoming disagreements and tensions) align with the CLT Move “Lead People and Teams.” The SEL Communication Practices (using language intentionally, listening, setting expectations for the long term) align with two CLT Moves: “Communicate Effectively” and “Prepare for Success over the Long Term.” The SEL Developmental Practices (learning, helping others learn, modeling) align with the CLT Move “Sensemake and Learn.” And finally, the SEL Structural Practices (hiring diverse leaders, making decisions with a systemic lens, creating rewards and incentives, implementing new approaches to accountability) align with two CLT Moves: “Lead People and Teams” and “Develop Strategy and Resources.” Figure 4 shows this alignment.

Figure 4: Areas of Alignment Between SEL Practices and CLT Moves

SEL Practices	CLT Moves
Relational Practices (build trust, cultivate positive relationships, welcome disagreements and tensions)	Lead People and Teams
Communication Practices (listen, use language intentionally, set expectations for the long term)	Communicate Effectively; Prepare for Success over the Long Term
Developmental Practices (learn, help others learn, model)	Sensemake and Learn
Structural Practices (hire diverse leaders, make decisions with a systemic lens, create rewards and incentives, implement new approaches to accountability)	Lead People and Teams; Develop Strategy and Resources (the resources part)

While they share similarities related to moves/practices, the SEL model is more specific about the type or character of these moves enacted in ways that foster equity as an outcome, not change more broadly. SEL Relational Practices, for example, are centered on addressing trauma, healing, and building trust that is lost in environments of racism and sexism. In the CLT, leading people is not equity-specific; rather, it is more about general capacity building or support that enables faculty and/or staff to conduct the work that will move change forward, whatever the goal may be.

There are also differences in the two models, including several moves and practices that don’t have equivalent representation in the other model. The SEL Foundational Practice of centering students’ needs, especially those from historically-marginalized backgrounds, does not have an equivalent among the CLT Moves; nor do the SEL Practices that Challenge the Status Quo (questioning, disrupting, diminishing hierarchy). Additionally, as we mentioned earlier, the CLT Move “Develop

Strategy and Resources” only partially aligns with the SEL Structural Practices — the “develop strategy” piece is not really represented in SEL. And two other CLT Moves (“Create Vision, Expectations, and Pacing” and “Engage in Advocacy and Navigate Politics”) are not aligned with any SEL practices.

Beyond the Moves and Practices that are not aligned, the CLT and SEL diverge in several important ways (see Figure 5). SEL is an ongoing, equity-centered leadership framework meant to represent mature work or work in progress and can be applied at any stage of a change effort. By contrast, the CLT is most useful at the outset or planning phase of systemic change. Both models assume that lasting change requires shifts at the individual and organizational levels, but they differ in how those shifts occur. SEL foregrounds personal values and commitments to equity; individuals live out those values through specific practices, both independently and collectively, and organizational change emerges as a critical mass adopts new behaviors that dismantle inequitable structures and build equitable ones. The CLT prioritizes individual reflection and the adoption of concrete leadership Moves, with less emphasis on values or personal engagement except as they expand a leader’s agency to act. Finally, the CLT brings explicit attention to leadership context and to levers that can accelerate progress, elements that the SEL does not emphasize.

Figure 5: Differences Between SEL and CLT

SEL	CLT
Ongoing leadership framework/process	Especially helpful in beginning or planning stages of systemic change process
Specifically intended to support equity	Supports any type of systemic change — not just equity
Focus on individual commitment to equity as part of a larger organizational change process (personal journey)	Focus on individual work as it relates to leader moves and comfort with taking different actions
Requires thinking about values you bring to the work and how you show up differently	No focus on values
Intended to create culture change so aimed at a particular type of systemic change	Aimed at systemic change more broadly (may include culture change or other types of systemic change)
Institutional context not as central	Focus on institutional context and how it can shape action
No focus on change levers	Requires thinking about levers that can accelerate or enhance change

*Please note that **bolded words** indicate core elements of each model (e.g. SEL personal journey, values and practices or CLT moves, context and levers)

Section 3

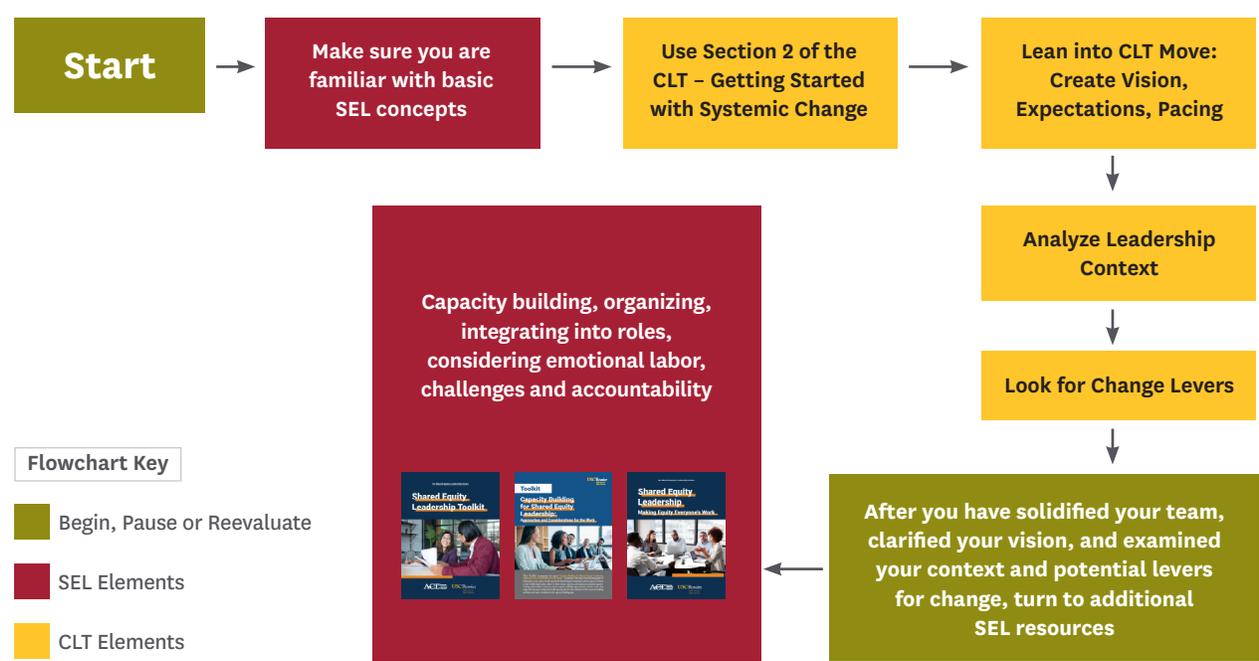
Using the Two Models Together

This guide has shown some of the similarities and differences between SEL and the CLT. In this section, you will learn how the models can complement one another and be used in tandem to enhance systemic change leadership on your campus or in your organization. Specifically, we first describe how leaders interested in implementing SEL on their campus can use the CLT to enhance their efforts. Then we outline how leaders using the CLT to drive non-equity-specific systemic change efforts can use principles of SEL to augment their process.

How to Incorporate the CLT if You Are Already Using SEL

First, read the first SEL report, **Shared Equity Leadership: Making Equity Everyone’s Work**, if you haven’t already done so. This report provides an overview of the SEL model and detail on the three main components (personal journey, values and practices).

Figure 6: How to Incorporate CLT if Starting with SEL



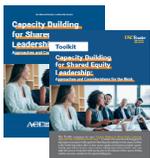
Next, use CLT resources to help you begin your planning:

- In particular, we recommend using several worksheets from Section 2 of the **Change Leadership Toolkit** called Getting Started with Systemic Change: Clarifying Your WHAT, WHY, and WHO of Change (pp. 11-20 of the CLT). The exercises in this section will help you clarify your desired goals and outcomes, the rationale behind your goals, and the right mix of people to help you accomplish your goals. For example, one campus that was planning an advising redesign and looking to improve advisor-faculty relationships used this worksheet to consider WHAT the new relationship should look like (how will communication occur, what sorts of structural changes are needed); the WHY driving the change (persistent inequities in probation, major changes, and gateway course attrition); and WHO will be responsible for particular tasks as the new structure is enacted.
- We also suggest leaning into one CLT Move at the beginning of your SEL planning process: “Create Vision, Expectations, and Pacing,” which will help you go deeper into the “what” and “why” of change, as well as start thinking about how you will accomplish your goals (see detailed descriptions of this Move categories and Sub-Moves on p. 25 of the CLT).
- You should also use the Leadership Context Worksheet (pp. 46-51) to help you analyze how your context might impact your work in eight different areas: institutional type, leadership and governance, culture, politics, human capital and capacity, resources (physical, financial and technical), and externalities. Each of these areas of context could shape your ability to implement SEL as well as how you might go about bringing an SEL approach to your campus.
- After you analyze your context, you can use the Levers Worksheet (pp. 52-56) to identify potential levers that could help you accelerate your progress towards SEL.

Turn to several other SEL resources to ensure you are all on the same page regarding your equity work. After you have clarified your vision, solidified your team, examined your context and potential levers for change, and considered moves that are not replicated in SEL, use the SEL resources listed below to ensure you are all on the same page about the core concepts of SEL:



First, we suggest using the **SEL Toolkit** to explore the personal journey, values and practices in more depth both as individuals and as a team.



Next, read or skim the report **Capacity Building for Shared Equity Leadership** and use the **Capacity Building Toolkit** to explore existing capacity on your campus and identify areas where you may need to build additional capacity. Also, review the Sensemake and Learn Moves in the CLT as you think about building capacity.



Third, consider what equity work might look like in different roles on your campus using the report **Leading from Where You Are** and the accompanying **Reflective Guide**.



You may also want to consider broader organizational structures to support the work. The report **Organizing Shared Equity Leadership** and its **Reflective Guide** will help you determine which structures may work best for your campus.



Fifth, as you think about how you will distribute the work and who will be responsible, make sure that you are also attentive to the emotional labor involved in equity work and the fact that women and those from racially-minoritized backgrounds often perform this labor disproportionately. For more insights into this important issue, read the report **Emotional Labor in Shared Equity Leadership Environments**.



Sixth, consider some of the potential challenges you might face as you work to distribute equity leadership more broadly. The report **Considerations and Challenges of Implementing Shared Equity Leadership** describes several common challenges that campuses face as they do this work, as well as strategies for navigating these challenges.



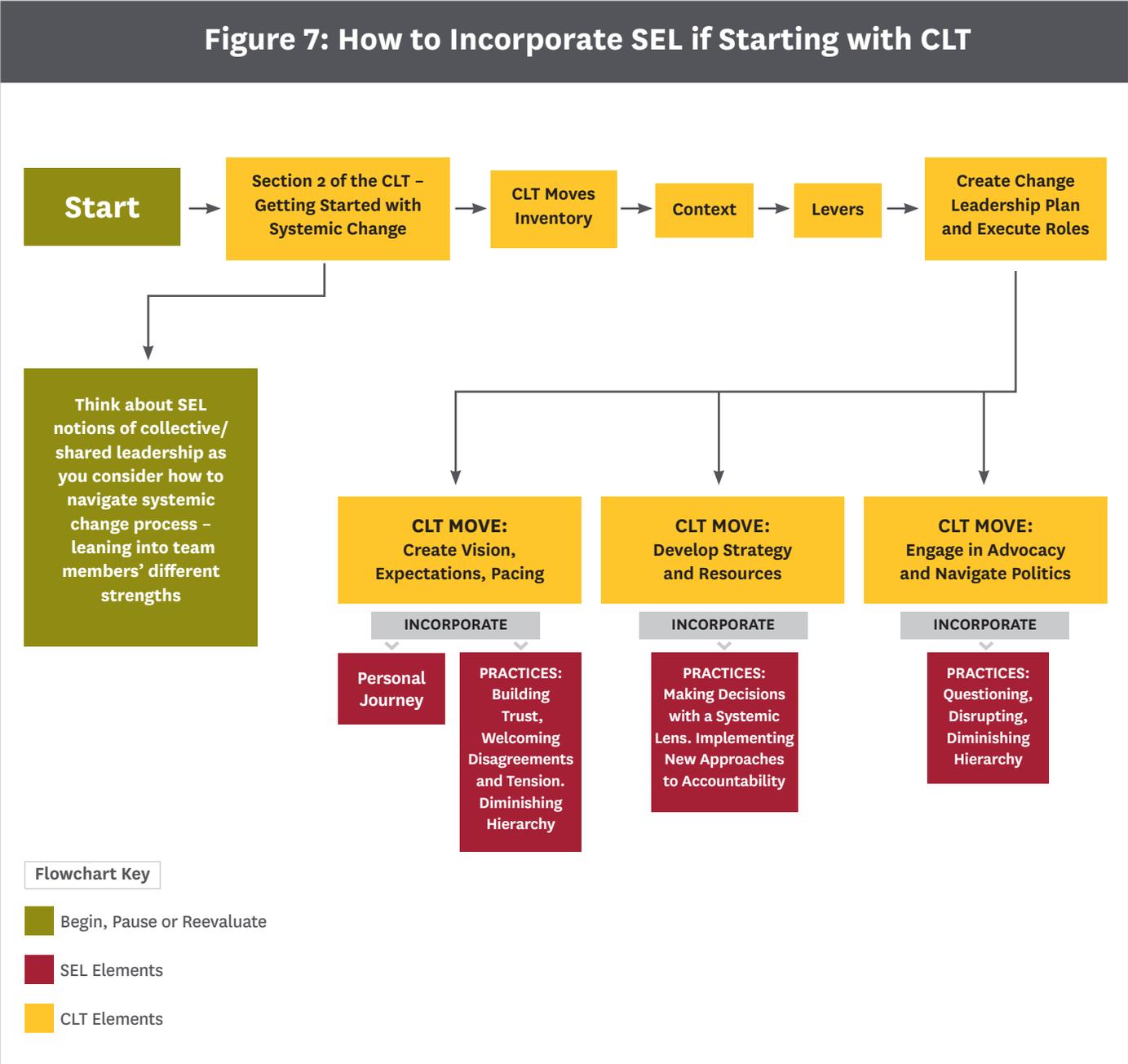
Finally, it is important to formalize shared responsibility for equity work through new accountability systems. Our report **Shared Responsibility Means Shared Accountability** and its accompanying **Toolkit** will guide you through the process of rethinking how you measure results and hold people accountable for equity work.

Consider how you might use the CLT Move “Develop Strategy and Resources” to help you think more concretely about how you will enact the principles and practices of SEL. If you would like some additional specific guidance on planning, you may find the CLT Change Leadership Planning Worksheet (pp. 59-67) to be helpful. Please ensure you are familiar with all the Change Leader Moves so you can use this worksheet effectively.

In both models, leadership can come from anywhere in the organization (faculty, staff, even students), not just senior leaders.

How to Incorporate SEL if You Are Already Using the CLT

While SEL may be less immediately relevant for leaders using the CLT to enact non-equity-specific systemic changes, SEL’s principles and resources can still help change leaders think about their values and their personal experiences and how they can best work collaboratively to make change.





First consider how SEL resources can be brought in as you and your team complete Section 2 of the CLT, **Getting Started with Systemic Change: Clarifying Your WHAT, WHY, and WHO of Change** (pp. 11-20 of the CLT). Specifically, as you reflect on your role and agency (pp. 16-18 of the CLT), you may find it helpful to read about the personal journey toward critical consciousness (pp. 9-15 of the **first SEL report**) and use some of the reflective questions in the SEL Toolkit to think more deeply about your agency. You may also find it helpful to read the SEL report **Leading for Equity from Where You Are** as you are thinking about your role and the various roles you have on your change leadership team. This report goes into depth about the notion of roles in general and offers specific examples of what leadership for equity can look like in different roles. Additionally, as you work through the Forming Teams Worksheet in the CLT (pp. 19-20), consider the values

important to the team and each team member. While the SEL values were identified in equity-focused contexts, most are universal and can inform leadership processes regardless of the project's goals.

Next, think about SEL's notions of collective or shared leadership more broadly as you consider how to navigate the systemic change leadership process. Specifically, the idea that shared leadership is effective because team members can lean into their different strengths at different times (in terms of both values and practices) can inform the way you think about which team members may be best positioned to make certain Moves or how you might capitalize on team members' strengths in different areas to advance your work. You can read the first SEL report, **Shared Equity Leadership: Making Equity Everyone's Work** for more details on these ideas.

Finally, a few of the CLT Moves can be oriented more toward equity by infusing them with SEL principles. As noted in Figure 4 on page 7, while several CLT Moves overlap with SEL practices, two have no analog in the SEL Model, and one Move only partially aligns with SEL practices. Below we describe how these three Moves can integrate SEL principles to become more aligned with equitable goals.

First, the **Create Vision, Expectations and Pacing Moves** can integrate the **personal journey** and the practices of **building trust, welcoming disagreements and tensions, and diminishing hierarchy**. As leaders work to develop a shared vision, they should encourage stakeholders to reflect on how their own identities and experiences may intersect with the vision for change and how those experiences can inform that vision. For example, faculty members who were themselves first-generation college students should be encouraged to bring their experiences to the table when working on an initiative to support first-generation students. Additionally, as the team builds a shared vision, leaders should utilize the SEL practices of building trust and welcoming disagreements and tensions (*relational practices*) so that team members and other stakeholders feel their voices are welcomed. Minoritized or dissenting opinions must also be heard and carefully considered. Leaders can also call upon the SEL practice of diminishing hierarchy (one of the *practices that challenge the status quo*) to ensure that team members with less power feel safe and supported in contributing to the development of the vision.

Second, the **Develop Strategy and Resources Moves** can incorporate the structural practices of **making decisions with a systemic lens** and **implementing new approaches to accountability**. Leaders should consider how their strategy aligns not just with their goals and vision but also helps align work that is already happening across the institution. For example, leaders working on a project that is focused on improving faculty teaching in STEM should look at other initiatives aimed at improving teaching quality across the entire institution, even if they may not be STEM-specific. Connecting or building up pockets of existing work is a core SEL strategy that can help support this CLT Move. Additionally, shared responsibility and shared accountability are core parts of the SEL model that can also inform this CLT Move. As leaders work to develop a strategy and marshal the appropriate resources to accomplish their goals, considering who will be responsible and accountable for each part of the strategy will be key.

Third, the **Engage in Advocacy and Navigate Politics Moves** can incorporate the SEL *practices that challenge the status quo* — **questioning, disrupting and diminishing hierarchy**. Whereas these Moves are intended to help leaders understand existing power structures and dynamics and how to navigate them, incorporating these SEL practices can help leaders question and disrupt these power structures and dynamics when they may be inhibiting change. Senior leaders in particular can think about how they might work to break down hierarchies so that a broader group of voices is heard.

Combining the CLT and SEL: A Real-World Example

In this section, we provide an example of what it might look like to use these models together, using a fictionalized composite of several campuses we have worked with in the past. At Palms University, a group of faculty came across the Shared Equity Leadership (SEL) model and thought it would be a strong fit for their campus. Palms had a diverse student body but persistent racial equity gaps in graduation rates and for first-generation and low-income students. Palms had many equity-related initiatives across campus but they were fragmented and disconnected from one another, and many faculty and staff were unaware of them. The two co-leads of the group at Palms, Eugene and Bella, started by clarifying their “what, who and why” of change using the CLT. They were able to hone in on some initial goals around inventorying, connecting, and coordinating existing equity programs on campus, as well as identifying spaces where there could be more focus on closing equity gaps. They determined that they needed representation from the faculty, academic leadership (e.g. deans, the provost or staff in those offices), student affairs, financial aid, registrar, institutional research (IR), and the multicultural centers on campus and admissions. Their “why” included a connection to Palms’ mission as a place where all students could thrive, regardless of background, as well as their status as a land-grant university. The fact that students from racially-minoritized, low-income, and first-generation backgrounds had notably lower success rates was a problem that put Palms out of alignment with its mission and identity.



After assembling their team, Eugene and Bella scheduled weekly meetings for the next two months. In these meetings, they worked with the group to clarify their vision and ensure its connection to their campus's mission and identity using the CLT Move "Create Vision, Expectations, and Pacing." They also used the CLT's Leadership Context worksheet to help them better understand how Palms had attempted to realize its mission in the past, as well as the history of equity efforts on campus. Finally, they used the CLT's Levers Worksheet to identify a potential Lever — Palms was just beginning a new strategic planning process, which they thought they could use to embed some of their change goals.

After two months, they planned a longer retreat with the team where they worked through exercises in the **SEL Toolkit** to reflect on their personal journeys, as well as the values and practices they would lean into to accomplish their goals. At the retreat, the SEL team also began to inventory and map out all the existing pockets of equity work across campus and identify areas where they needed more data or information. They used the **Reflective Guide** on Organizing Shared Equity Leadership to determine that Palms had a decentralized model for organizing DEI work, with no Chief Diversity Officer or university-level DEI office. As the SEL team completed their mapping process, they found there was significant unevenness in how equity work was managed across campus. Several schools and divisions had a relatively senior person or even an office tasked with managing equity work, while others had no one dedicated to the work at all. By this point (about three months into their process), Bella had been appointed to serve on the strategic planning committee and shared the SEL team's findings with the committee and senior leadership. They realized that they didn't even have a consistent, campuswide definition of equity, which contributed to the fragmentation and unevenness they were experiencing. Senior leadership tasked the SEL team with creating a draft definition of equity for the campus and agreed that a more consistent approach to the work across campus was needed, guided by SEL principles.

Now, the strategic planning committee is planning to create a goal or sub-goal around using SEL to create a more consistent and distributed approach to equity work at Palms. They are using the CLT to map key opportunities and barriers to guide the next steps of their plan.

Leaders should consider how their strategy aligns not just with their goals and vision but also helps align work that is already happening across the institution.

Section 4

Conclusion

Conclusion

As a reminder, when using the two frameworks together, you may experience additive effects that would not be realized by using either in isolation (Figure 8). For example, your SEL work will be more tailored to your unique institutional context and potential levers that can accelerate your work by incorporating the CLT. The CLT can also support more detailed and targeted planning and goal-setting as you work to implement your SEL goals. You may also see that incorporating SEL Values and Practices can enhance your ability to make specific Leader Moves to advance your change work. And work that may start out with the CLT and more general change may take on a more equity-oriented vision and strategy by incorporating SEL. By using both frameworks, you may create a more sustainable change infrastructure that is equity-focused and builds shared values and vision across the institution.

Figure 8: Key Areas of Potential Amplification when using SEL and CLT Together

**CLT Context and Levers
Inform SEL Work**

**CLT Tools Support More
Effective Planning for SEL**

**CLT Leader Moves Enhanced
by SEL Principles**

**Change Projects Gain
Equity-Oriented Visions and
Strategy with SEL**

About the Pullias Center

One of the world's leading research centers on higher education, the Pullias Center for Higher Education at the USC Rossier School of Education advances innovative, scalable solutions to improve college outcomes for all students and to enhance the performance of postsecondary institutions. The mission of the Pullias Center is to bring an equity-focused, multidisciplinary perspective to complex social, political and economic issues in higher education. The Center is currently engaged in research projects to improve access, admissions and outcomes for low-income, first-generation students, improve the performance of postsecondary institutions, assess the role of contingent/VITAL faculty, understand how colleges can undergo reform to increase their effectiveness, analyze emerging organizational forms such as for-profit institutions, and assess the educational trajectories of community college students. Learn more at pullias.usc.edu.

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