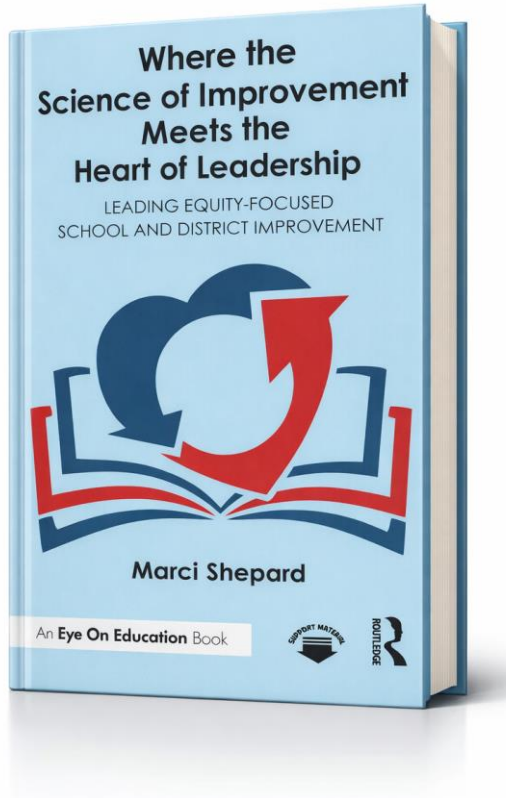
Bridging Vision and Implementation:
Teaching Improvement Leadership for Schools and Districts

Marci Shepard, PhD, EdD



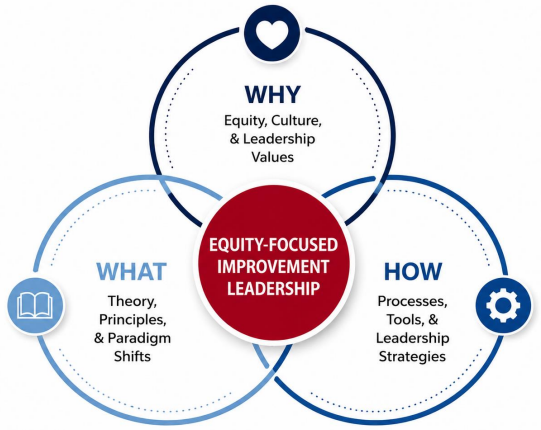
Let's Connect

TransformEDLeadership.com

MarciShepard

Session Handouts

TransformEDLeadership.com
under
Publications & Resources



◎ Learning Target

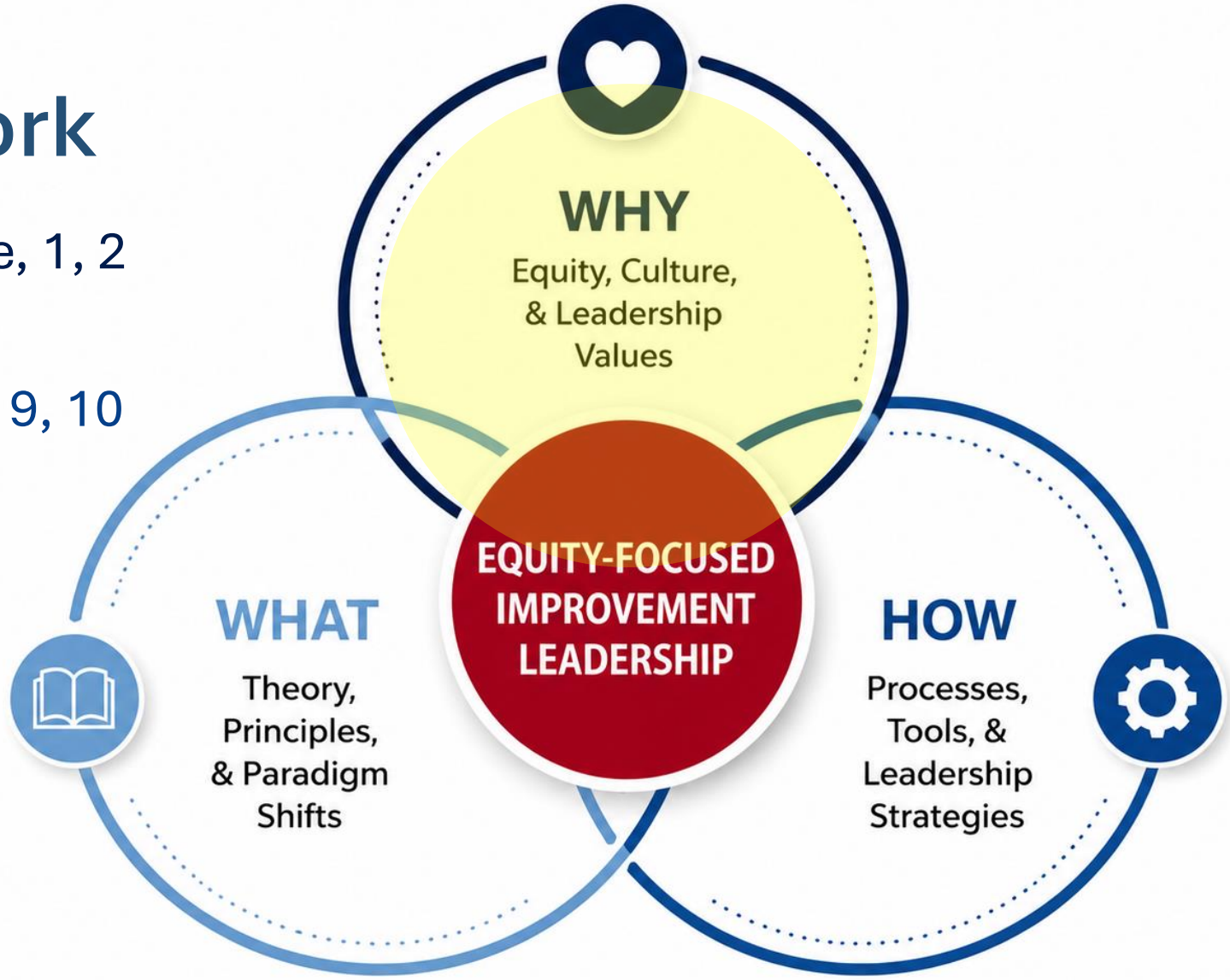
I can explore strategies and resources for teaching collaborative continuous improvement.

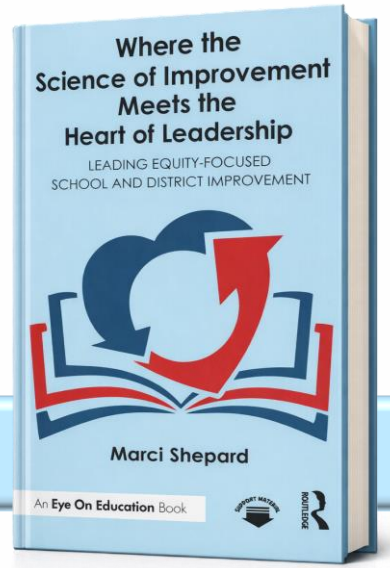
Success Criteria

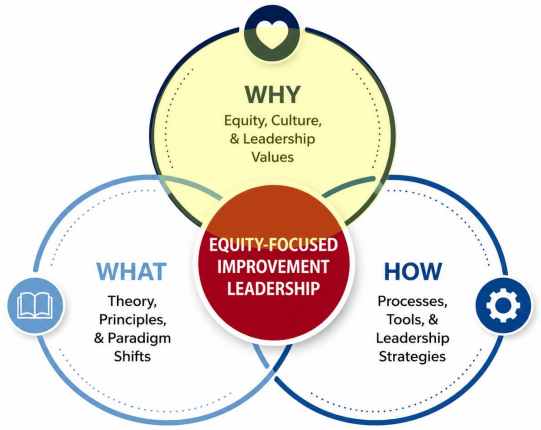
- WHY: Preview the integration of equity, improvement science, and culture.
- WHAT: Recognize foundational principles and leadership paradigm shifts.
- HOW: **Explore an inquiry process and teaching tools.**
- CULTURE: Consider the influence of culture and system coherence.
- APPLY: Identify one change idea for my teaching.

Framework

- Why: Preface, 1, 2
- What: 3, 4, 5
- How: 6, 7, 8, 9, 10

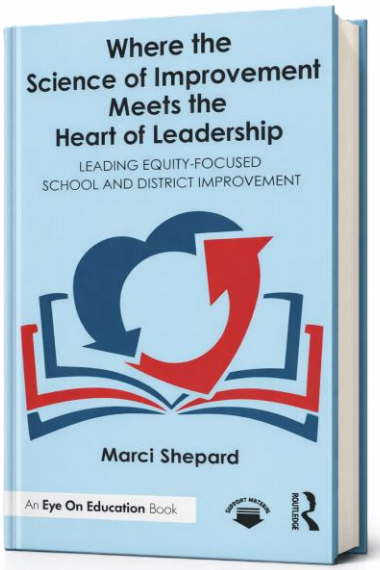






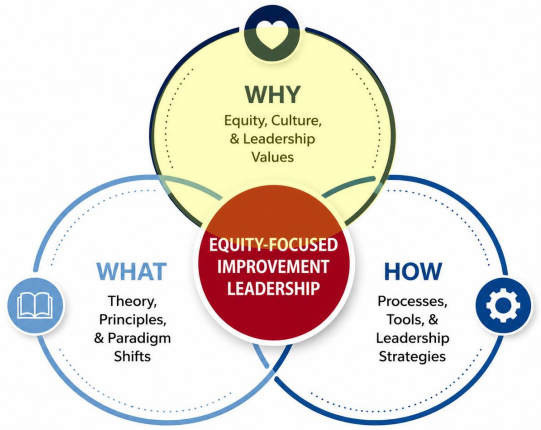
Where the Science of Improvement Meets the Heart of Leadership

LEADING EQUITY-FOCUSED SCHOOL AND DISTRICT IMPROVEMENT



Teaching Resource: Preface & Chapter 1

Marci Shepard, PhD, EdD



Where the Science of Improvement Meets the Heart of Leadership

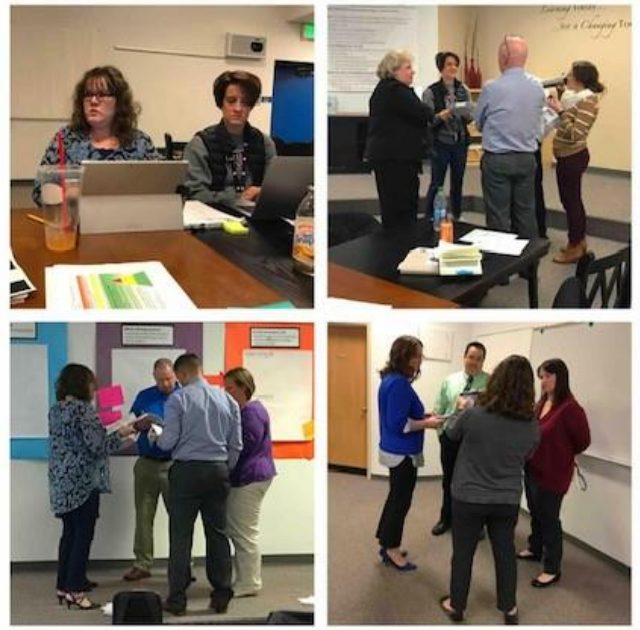
PREFACE

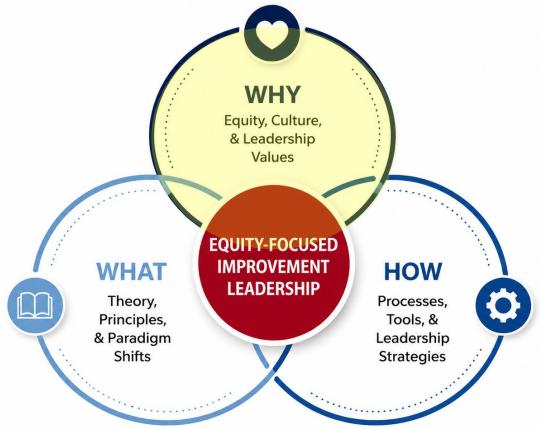
LEADING EQUITY-FOCUSED

SCHOOL AND DISTRICT IMPROVEMENT

- Systems that ensure every student succeeds
- Start with the local context
- Improve *with* people, not *for* people

Important learning and diving into data with OSD's leadership team on barriers that prevent EACH student from being READY - ABCs (Attendance, Behavior/discipline, & Course grades). This team is passionately committed!





Where the Science of Improvement Meets the Heart of Leadership

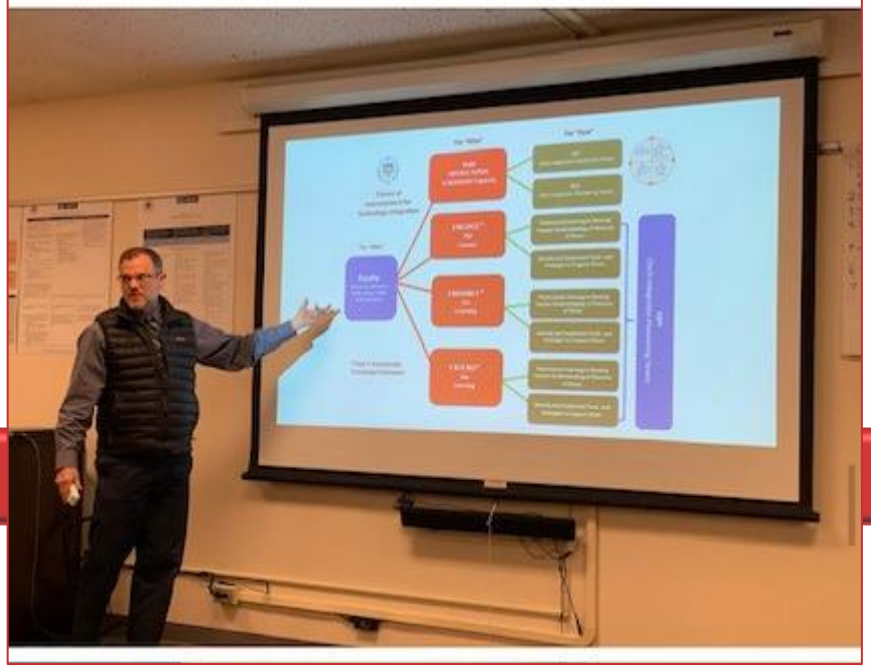
CHAPTER 1

LEADING EQUITY-FOCUSED

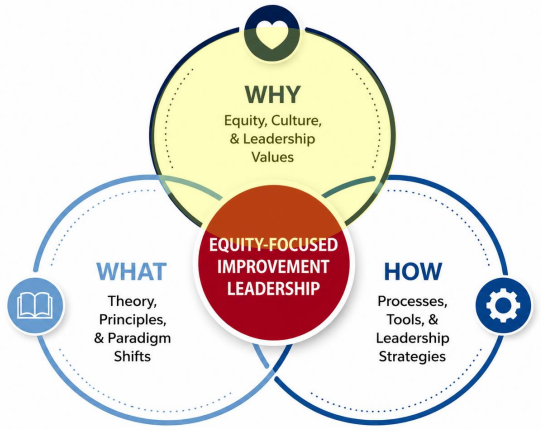
SCHOOL AND DISTRICT IMPROVEMENT

- Collaborative, iterative problem-solving by understanding the system, testing change ideas, and scaling what works.
- Systems-thinking - Improving the system that produces the problem
- Coherence – Improvement at scale is part of our equity imperative

In District Leadership Team right now framing our Instructional Technology work around Improvement Science for continuous improvement! #LifeReady #AuthenticLearning



Teaching Resource: Chapter 1 Try This

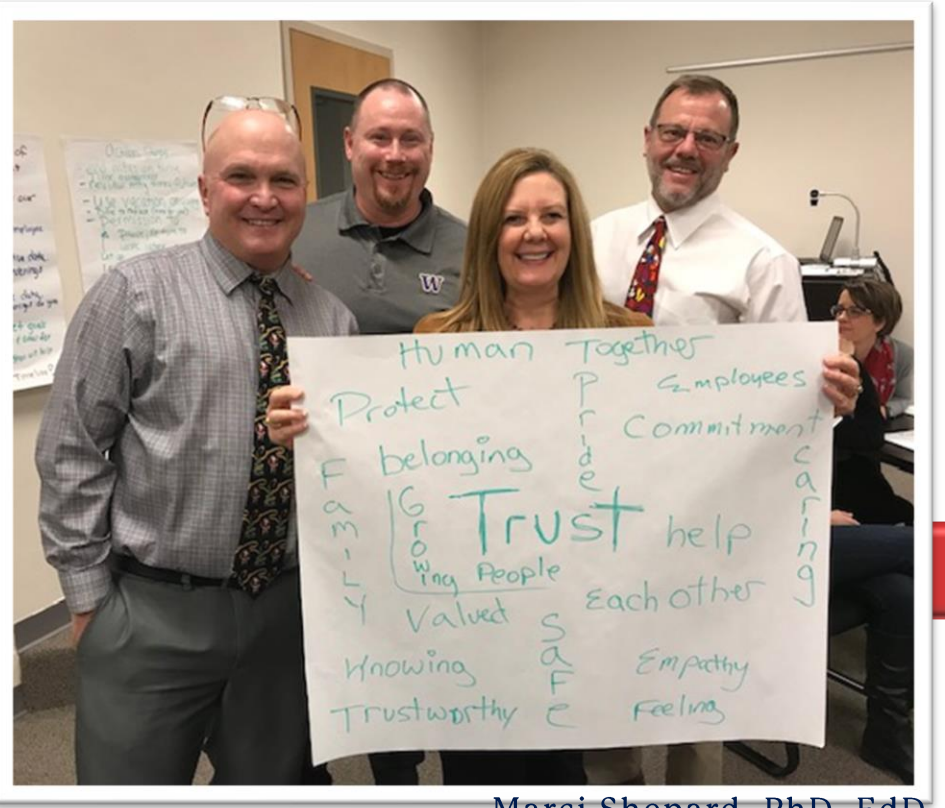


CHAPTER 2

Where the Science of Improvement Meets the Heart of Leadership

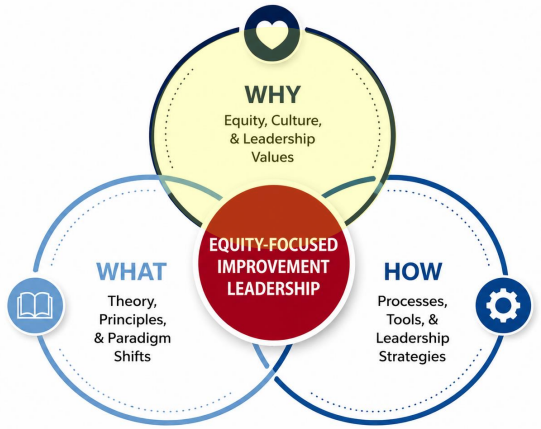
LEADING EQUITY-FOCUSED SCHOOL AND DISTRICT IMPROVEMENT

- Begins with *who* we are
- Turns vision into action by creating the conditions for improvement
- Learns from other leaders in the field



Marci Shepard, PhD, EdD

🗁Teaching Resources: Chapter 2 Try This & Core Values Activity Materials



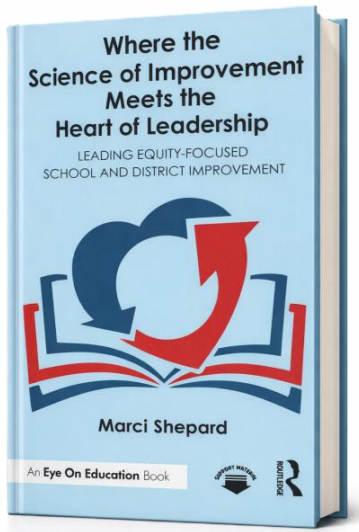
Technical leadership – Implementing improvement principles and disciplined inquiry

Where the Science of Improvement Meets the Heart of Leadership

LEADING EQUITY-FOCUSED SCHOOL AND DISTRICT IMPROVEMENT

Relational leadership – Cultural conditions of collaboration, shared ownership, and psychological safety

Marci Shepard, PhD, EdD



1. Routledge Where the Science of Improvement Meets the Heart of Leadership
2. Support Material ≈ 30 improvement tools

The Instructional Design of Every Chapter

A consistent structure that moves learners from understanding to leadership.

1 PREPARE TO LEARN
Establishes the WHY

- Learning Target & Success Criteria
- Relevant NELP Standards
- Icebreaker
- Case Vignette

2 BUILD UNDERSTANDING
Develops the WHAT

- Research & Content
- Voices of Leaders

3 APPLY & EXTEND LEARNING
Practices the HOW

- Reflection Questions
- Try This Activities & Downloadable Improvement Tools
- Leadership-in-Action Story
- References

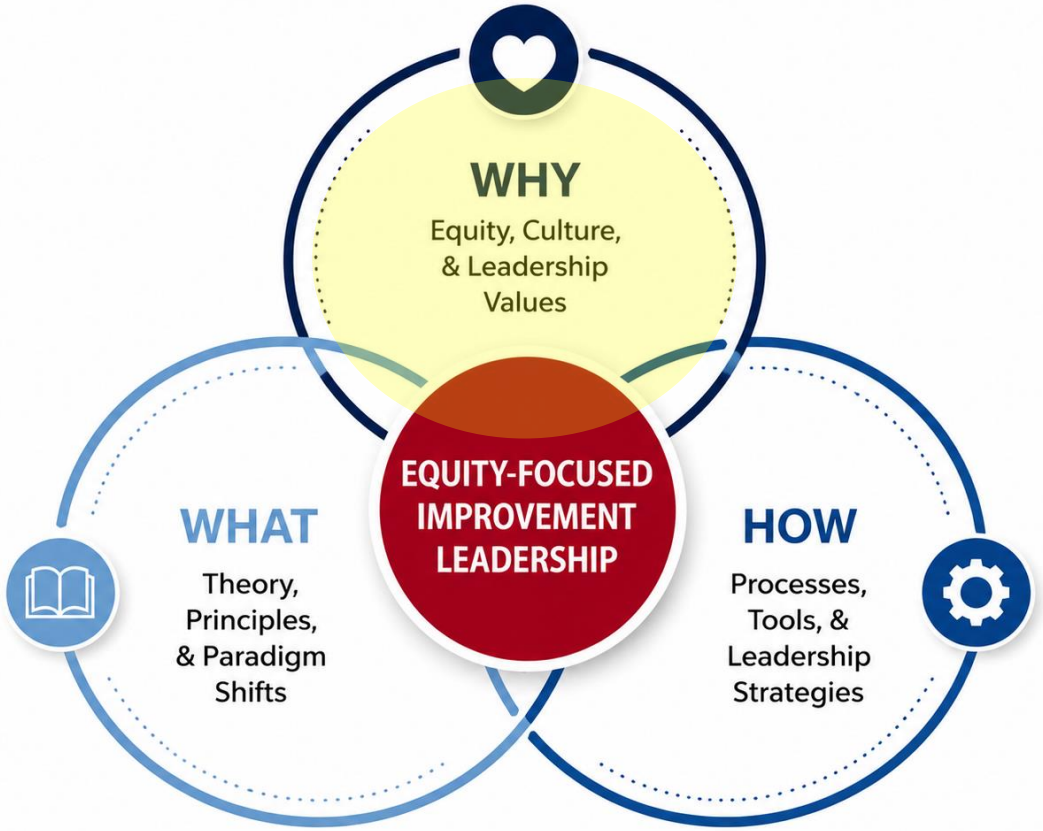
WHY · WHAT · HOW

FROM **WHY** → TO **HOW**

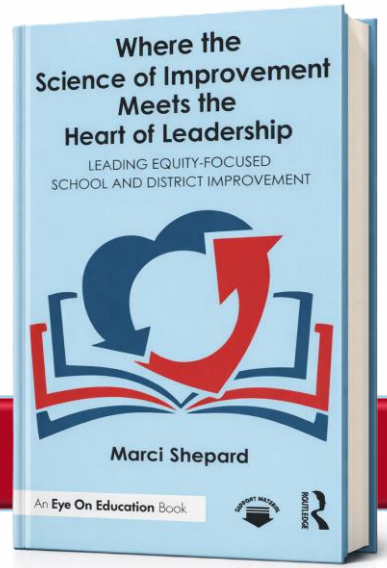
Preparing leaders who **understand improvement** | Preparing leaders who **can lead improvement**

WHY Teaching Resources Available

Why: Preface, Chapters 1, 2

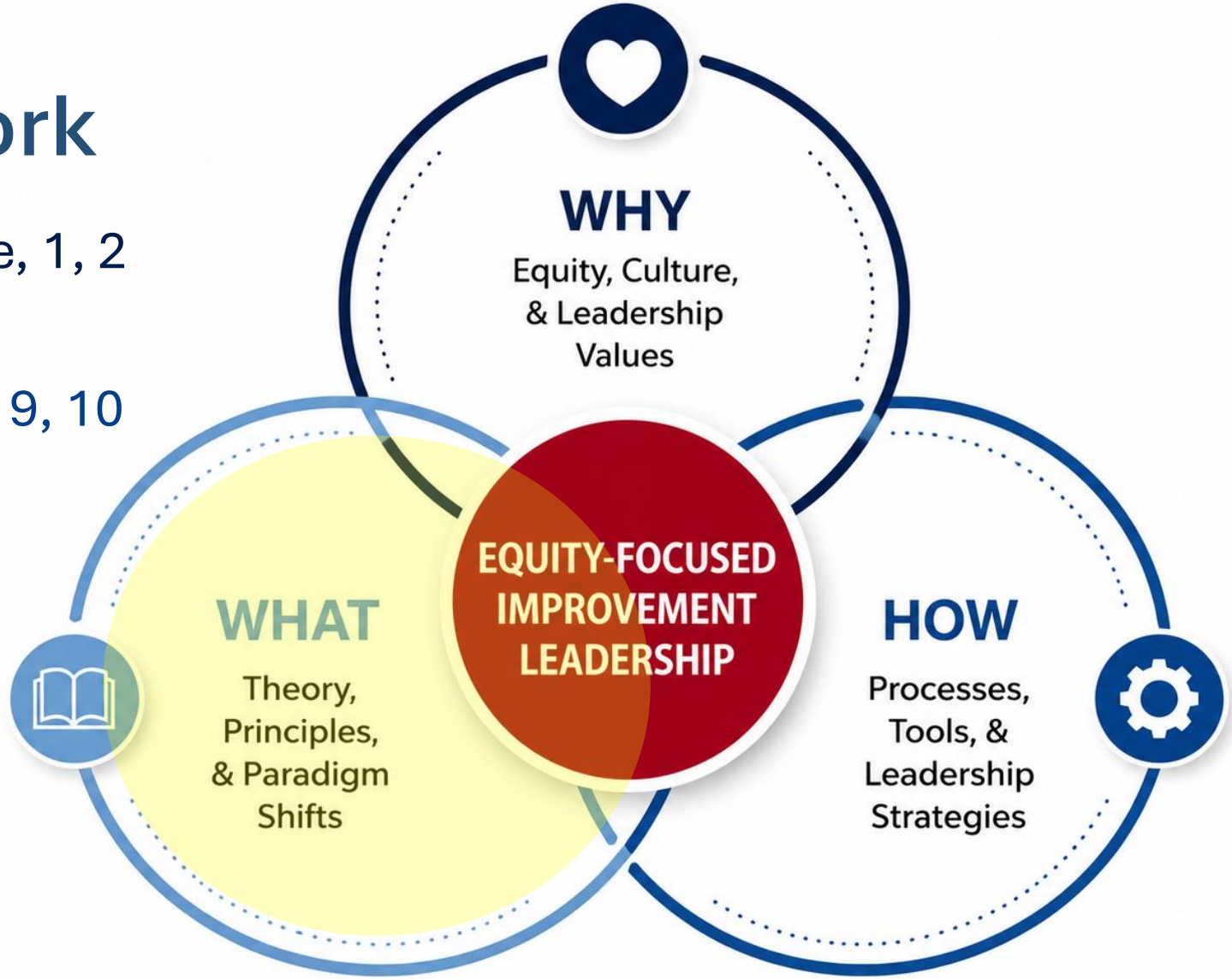


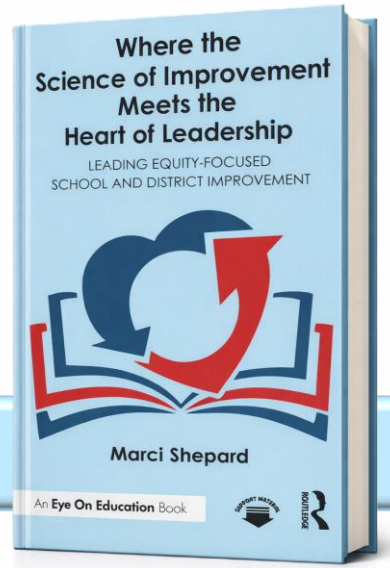
- ✓ WHY PowerPoint
- ✓ Book sections: Preface & Chapter 1
- ✓ Preface Try This: Self-Assessment - Where Are You On Your Improvement Journey
- ✓ Chapter 1 Try This: Build a Workplace Culture for Continuous
- ✓ Chapter 2 Try This: Identify Your Leadership Values
- ✓ Lesson materials: Core values list and integrity inventory

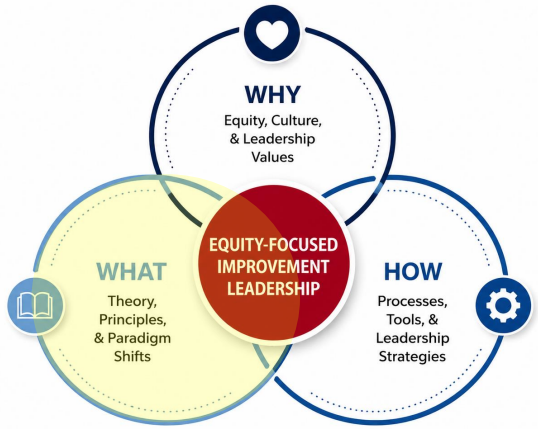


Framework

- Why: Preface, 1, 2
- What: 3, 4, 5
- How: 6, 7, 8, 9, 10







CHAPTER 3

Knowledge Base for Improvement Leadership

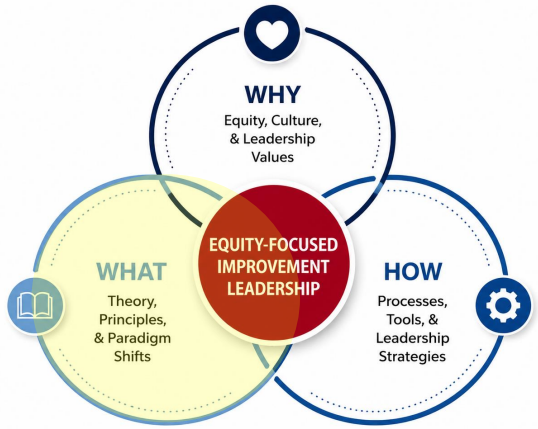
Improvement Theory:
Foundations of improvement science through Deming's System of Profound Knowledge, leadership transformation, deadly diseases, and PDSA cycle (as well as other literature)

(Deming, 1982, 1994)



Teaching Resource: Chapter 3 Try This

Marci Shepard, PhD, EdD

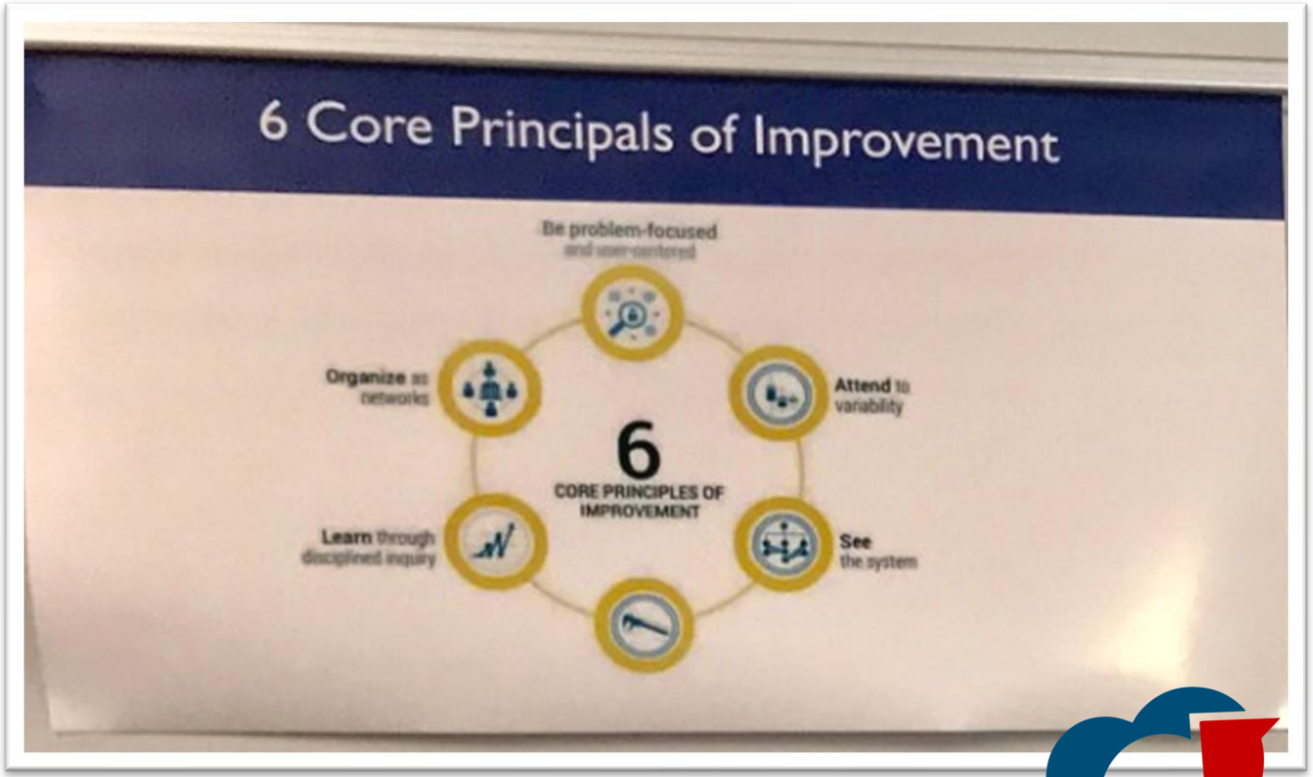


CHAPTER 4

Knowledge Base for Improvement Leadership

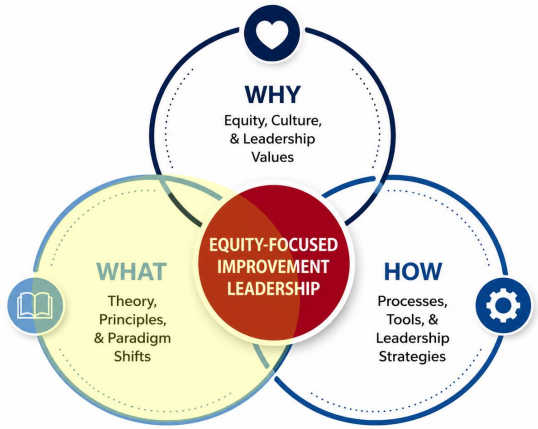
Improvement Principles: Six evidence-based principles for improving systems through disciplined inquiry, meaningful measures, and collaborative learning

(Bryk et al., 2015)



Teaching Resource: Chapter 4 Try This

Marci Shepard, PhD, EdD



CHAPTER 5

Knowledge Base for Improvement Leadership

Improvement Leadership:
Six research-based leadership paradigm shifts that develop the dispositions needed for collaborative continuous improvement





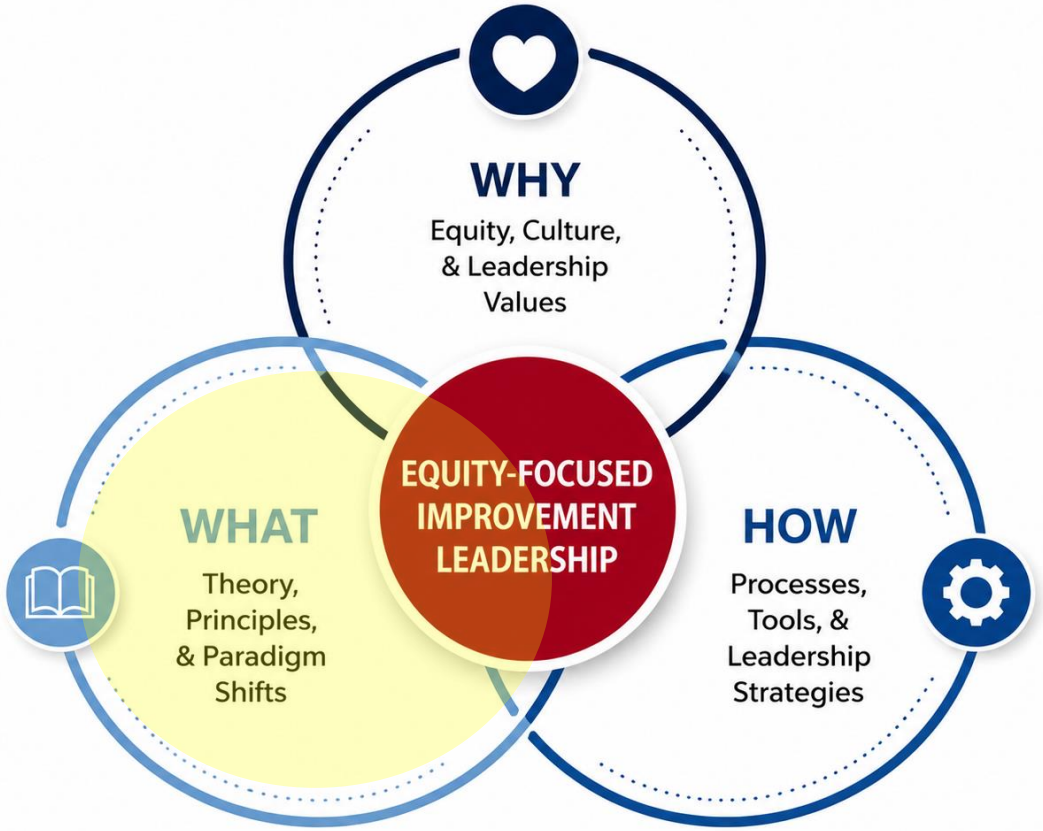


Teaching Resource: Chapter 5 Try This

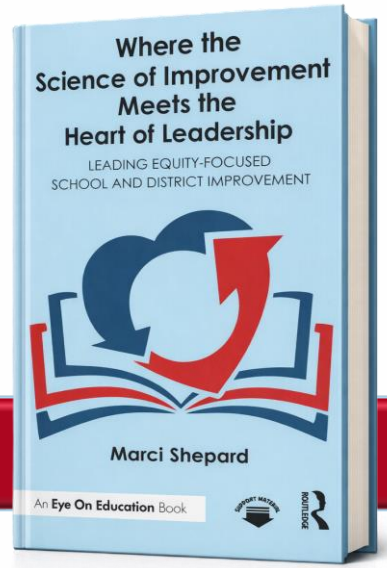
Marci Shepard, PhD, EdD

WHAT Teaching Resources Available

What: Chapters 3, 4, 5

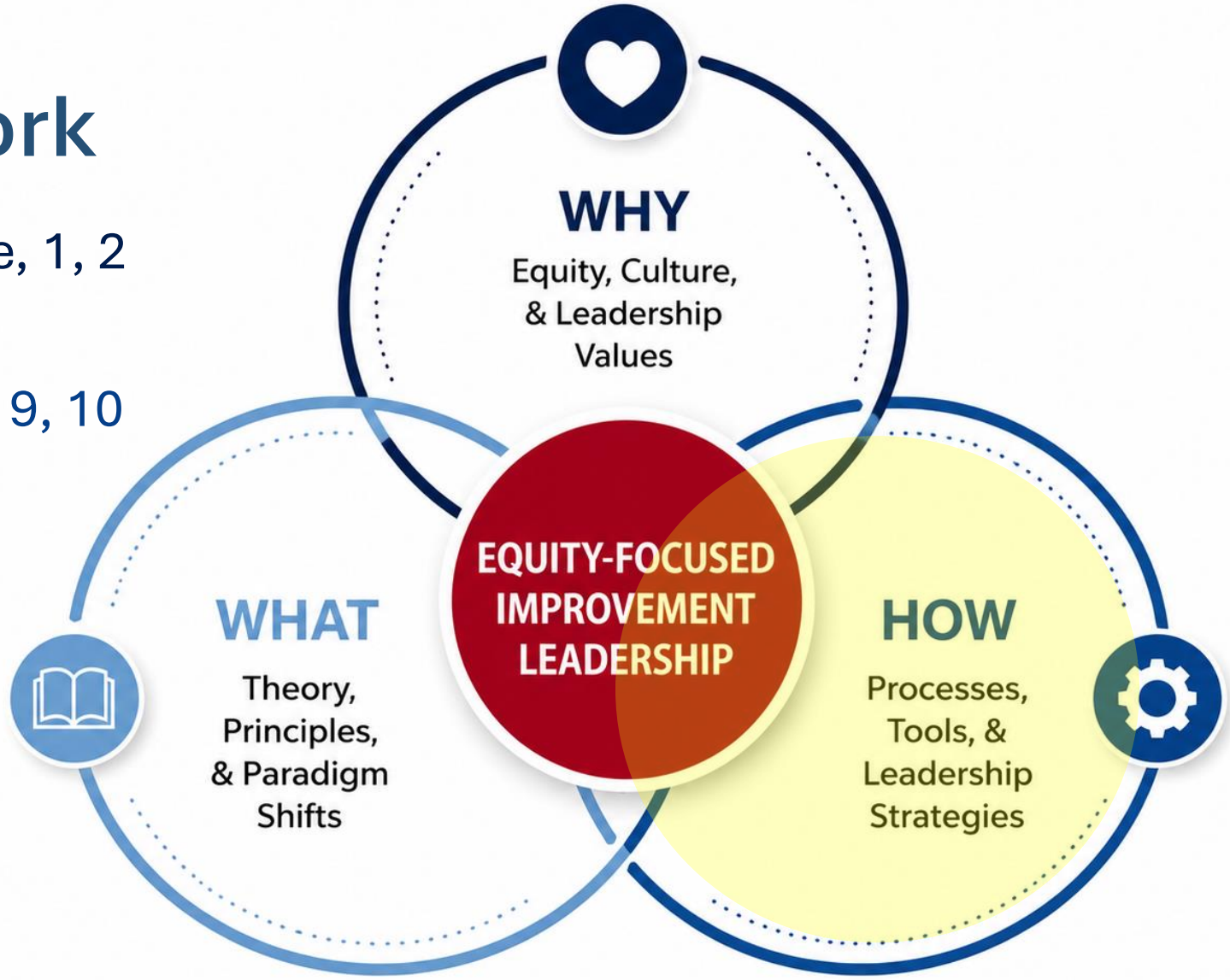


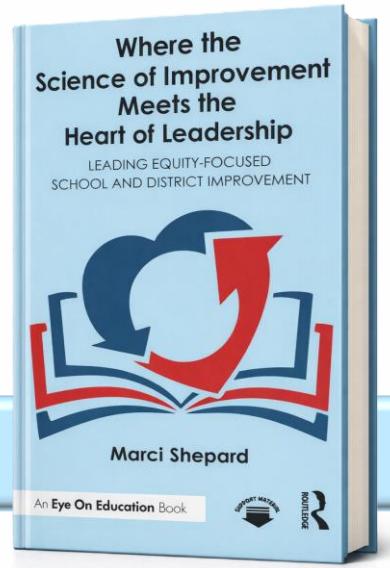
- ✓ WHAT PowerPoint
- ✓ Chapter 3 Try This: Apply Deming's PDSA Cycle to Your Own Leadership Practice
- ✓ Chapter 4 Try This: Apply the Six Principles of Improvement
- ✓ Chapter 5 Try This: Apply the Six Leadership Paradigm Shifts

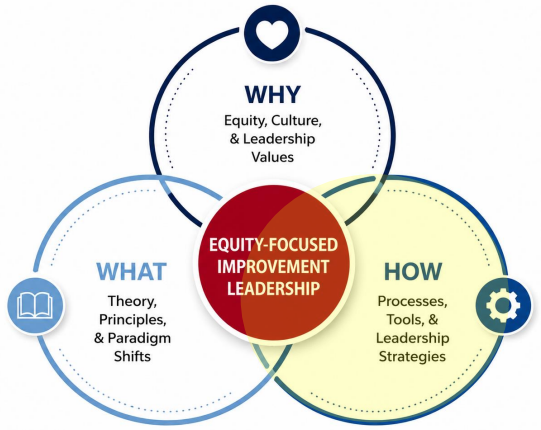


Framework

- Why: Preface, 1, 2
- What: 3, 4, 5
- How: 6, 7, 8, 9, 10



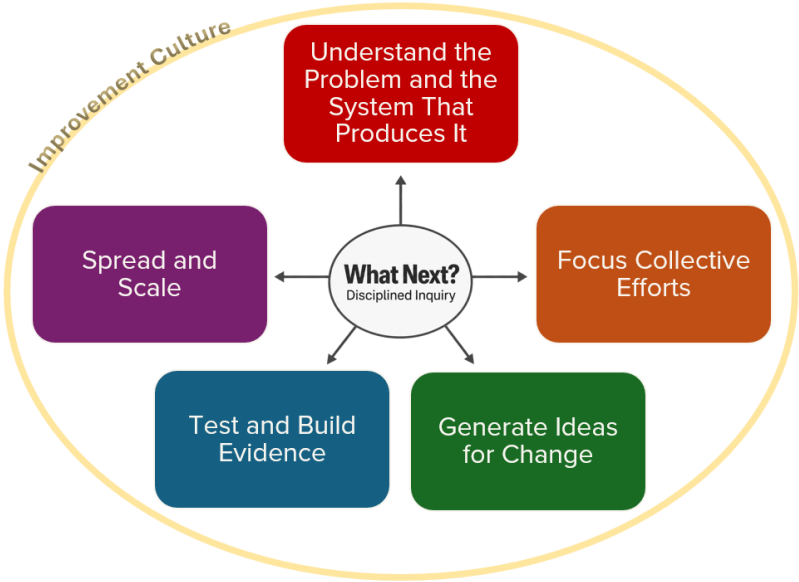




But what do I *DO*?

APPENDIX 2 CHAPTER 6

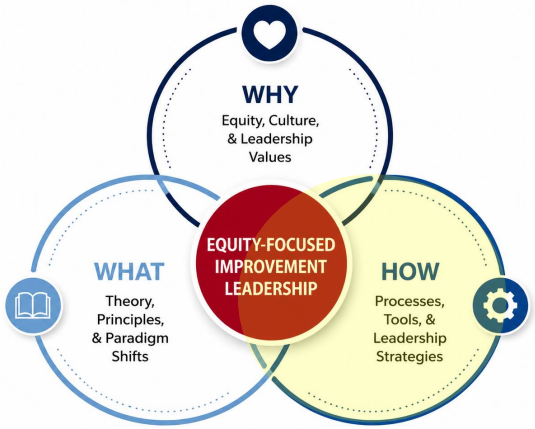
- Practical five-phase process for leading improvement through **disciplined inquiry**
- Enacts equity, collaboration, and **context-specific** learning
- Ready-to-Use tools and protocols for **faculty teaching leaders** and for **leaders facilitating teams**

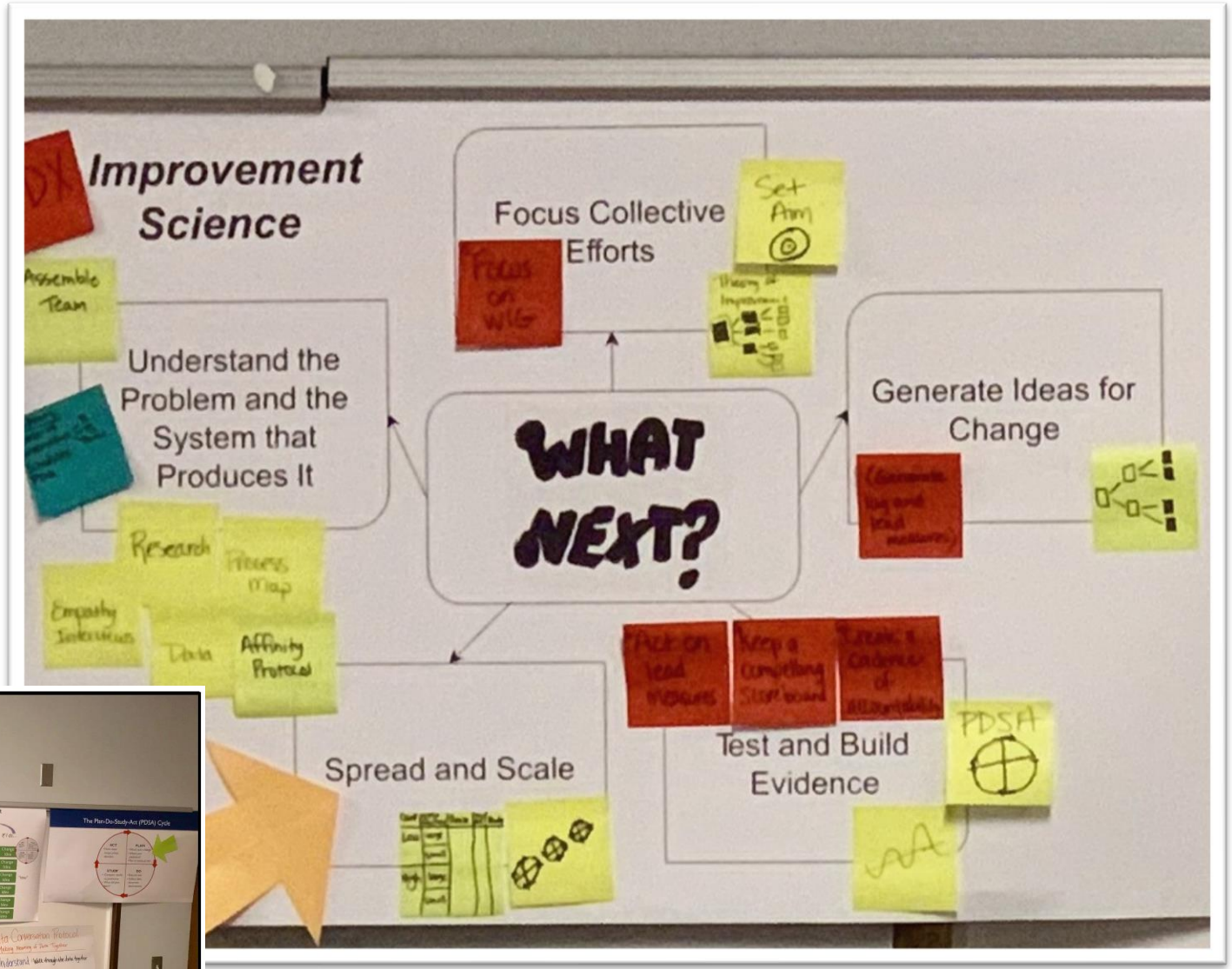


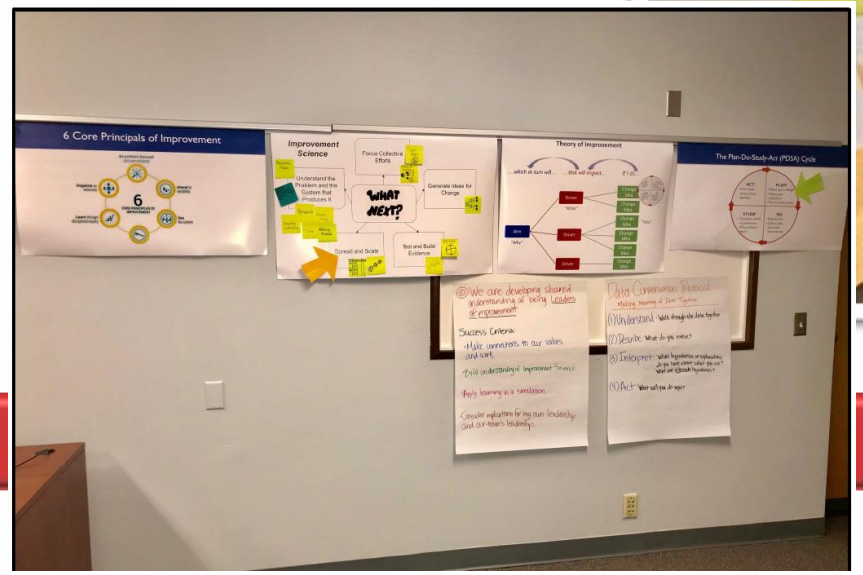
5-Phases (The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2018). Used with permission.
Improvement Culture (Shepard, 2026)

(Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2018)

Teaching Resource: Chapter 6 Try This - 19 Tools in Appendix 2







APPENDIX 2

CHAPTER 6

Marci Shepard, PhD, EdD

The system is perfectly designed to get the results it is getting.

Change begins with a dissatisfaction with the status quo



PAUSE 1

Problem to Explore

What is one inequitable outcome or problem in your work that keeps you up at night?



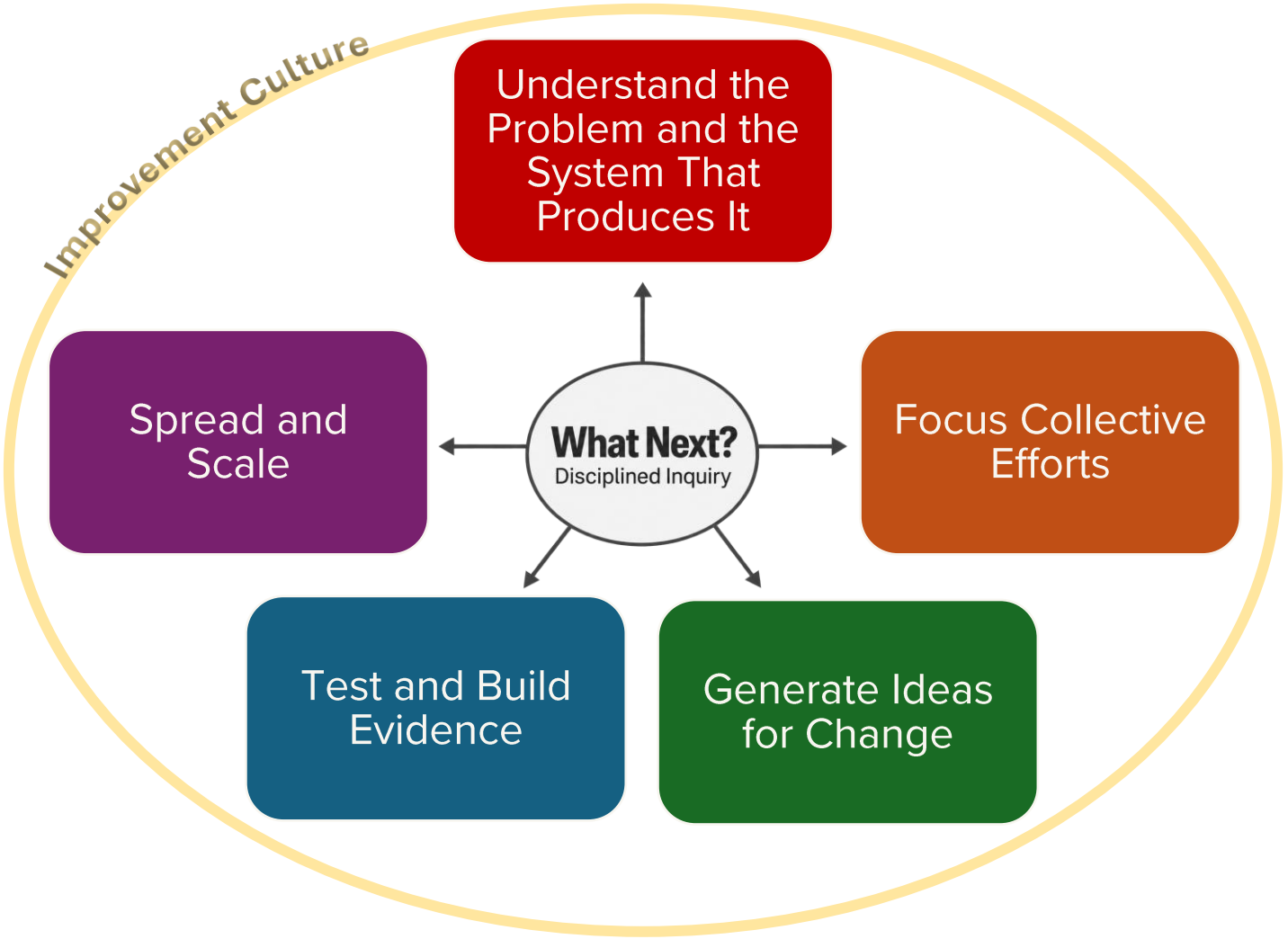
Discuss potential problems at your table, then select **one** that your team will use as you think through teaching the five-phase inquiry process.

Our Selected Problem:

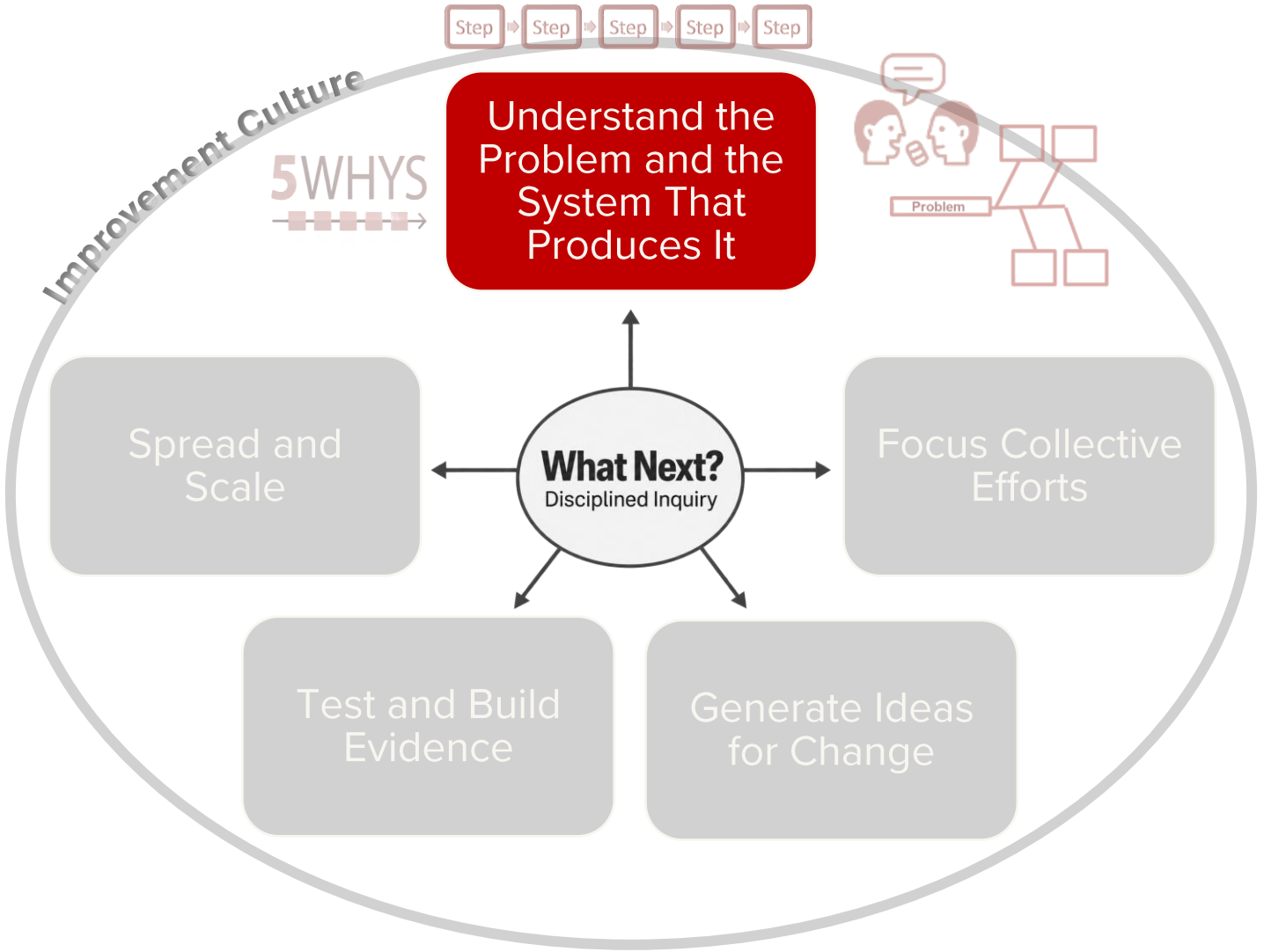
Teaching Resource: Appendix 2.2 Identify an Issue

Marci Shepard, PhD, EdD



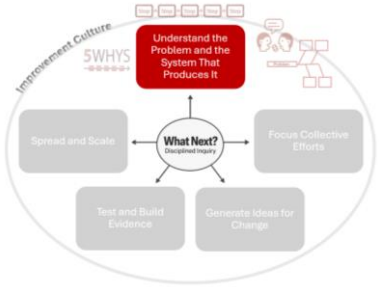


5-Phases (The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2018). Used with permission.
Improvement Culture (Shepard, 2026)


Step
Step
Step
Step
Step
Improvement Culture
5WHYS
Understand the Problem and the System That Produces It
Problem
Spread and Scale
What Next?
Disciplined Inquiry
Focus Collective Efforts
Test and Build Evidence
Generate Ideas for Change

Make Meaning of Data

Appendix 2.3



Data Analysis Protocol

Use data to explore what's happening, find patterns, and generate hypotheses about root causes.

Data helps us move from opinions to evidence and opens up new questions.

1 Data Overview and Understanding

Get clear on what data you're looking at.

- What dataset are we analyzing?
- What is the timeframe of the data?
- Who is represented in the data?
- What is being measured?

2 Notice–Identify Patterns and Trends

Look for what stands out.

- What do we see? (Record observations without interpretation or judgment.)
- Examples: trends, differences between groups, variations

3 Wonder—Generate Questions

Let the data spark curiosity.

- What questions emerge from the patterns?
- Why are certain student groups outperforming or underperforming?
- What additional data or information do we need to deepen our understanding?

4 Interpret—Hypothesize Root Causes

Use what you've learned to develop explanations.

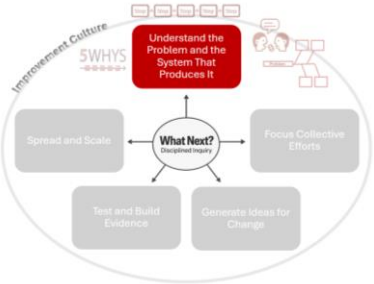
- What might be contributing to these trends?
- What additional data or information is needed to confirm or challenge these hypotheses?

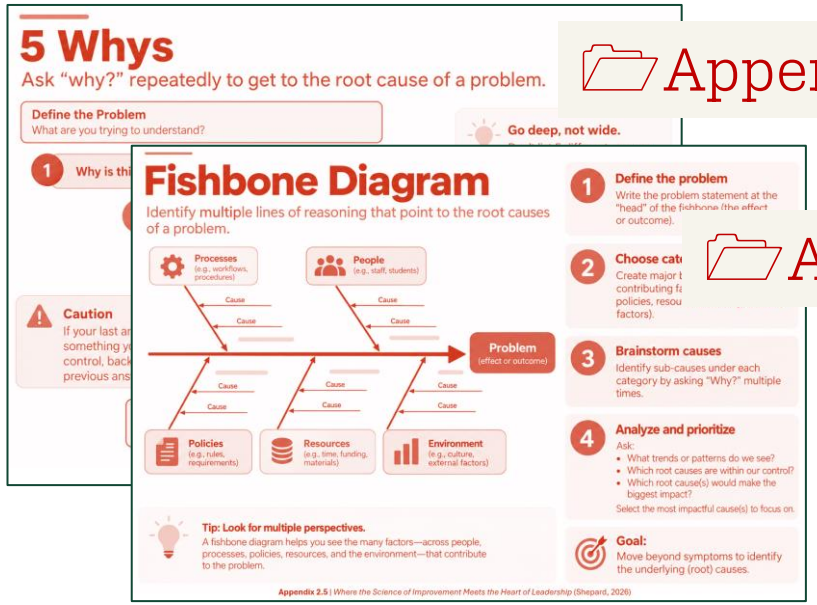
Goal: Use data to deepen your understanding of the problem and inform next steps.

Appendix 2.3 | *Where the Science of Improvement Meets the Heart of Leadership* (Shepard, 2026)

Marci Shepard, PhD, EdD

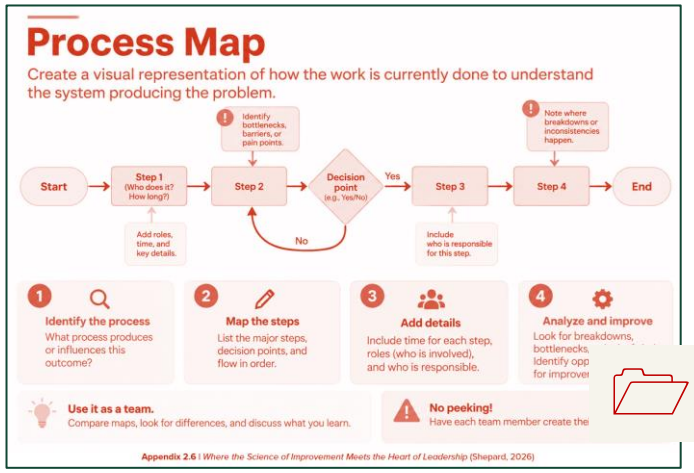
Understand the System





Appendix 2.4

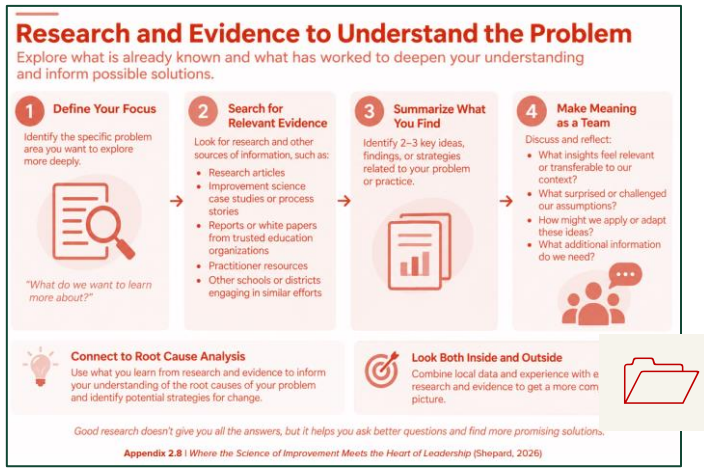
Appendix 2.5



Appendix 2.6



Appendix 2.7



Appendix 2.8

Marci Shepard, PhD, EdD

Affinity Protocol

Use insights from multiple sources to identify key themes and narrow in on a specific problem to prioritize.

Turn lots of information into a clear focus.

The affinity protocol helps teams find common themes and identify where to focus.

1 Gather insights

Use your assigned resource to identify your top 1–2 insights about the problem. Write each insight on a sticky note.



2 Cluster similar ideas

Work together to group sticky notes based on common themes or similarities.



3 Label categories

Name the major themes that emerge from your clusters.



4 Discuss key takeaways

Look across the themes and discuss what you're learning. Identify major patterns or insights about the problem.

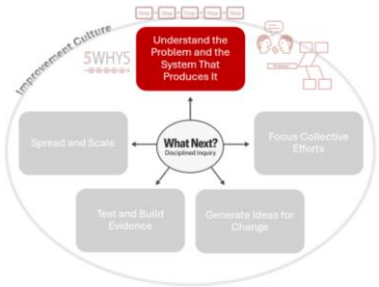


5 Choose where to focus

Use your findings to hone in on the team's specific problem. Consider:

- Which part can we most effectively address right now?
- Wh… the…
- What is within our control?

Appendix 2.9

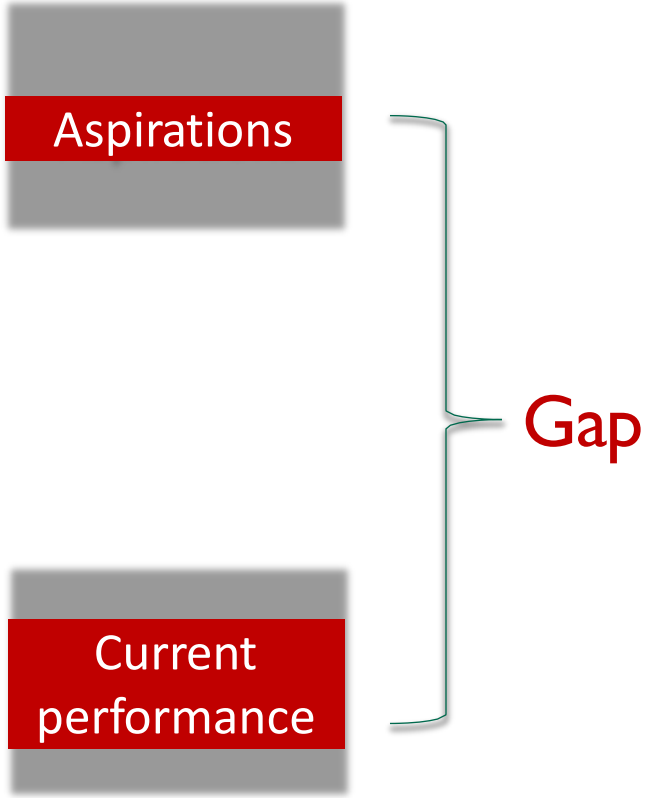


Outcome

A clear, narrowed problem area to prioritize for the next phase of work.

Many perspectives.
Shared understanding.
A clearer path forward.

Appendix 2.9 | *Where the Science of Improvement Meets the Heart of Leadership* (Shepard, 2026)

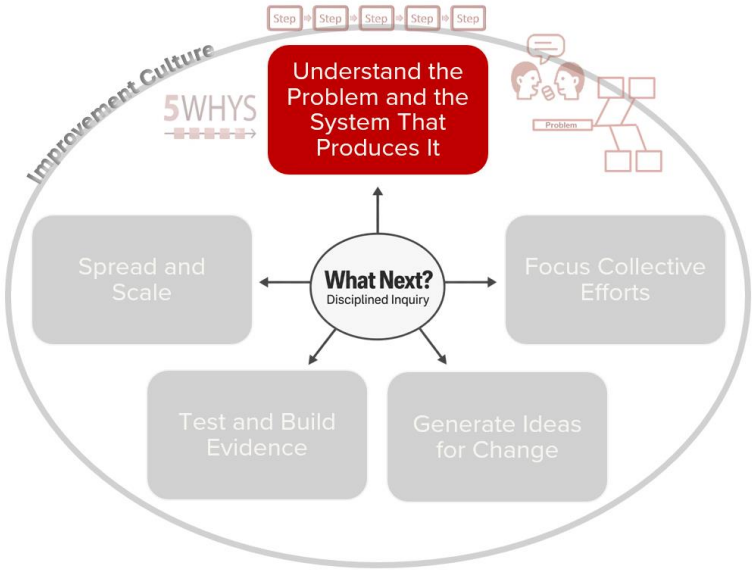


Why are we getting the outcomes we are currently getting?

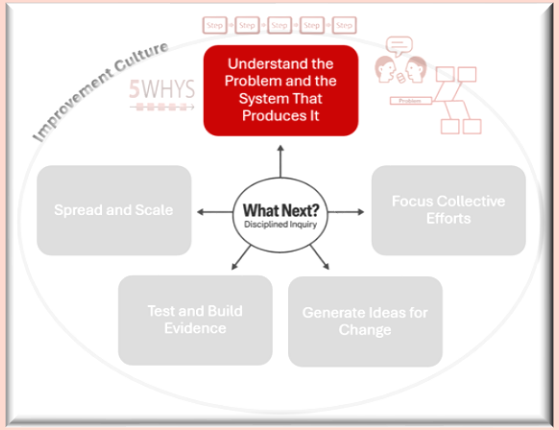
Let's go investigate.

PAUSE 2

Phase 1: Understand the Problem and the System Producing It



Phase 1: Understand the Problem and the System Producing It



Explore the tools in your packet. With your table, discuss:

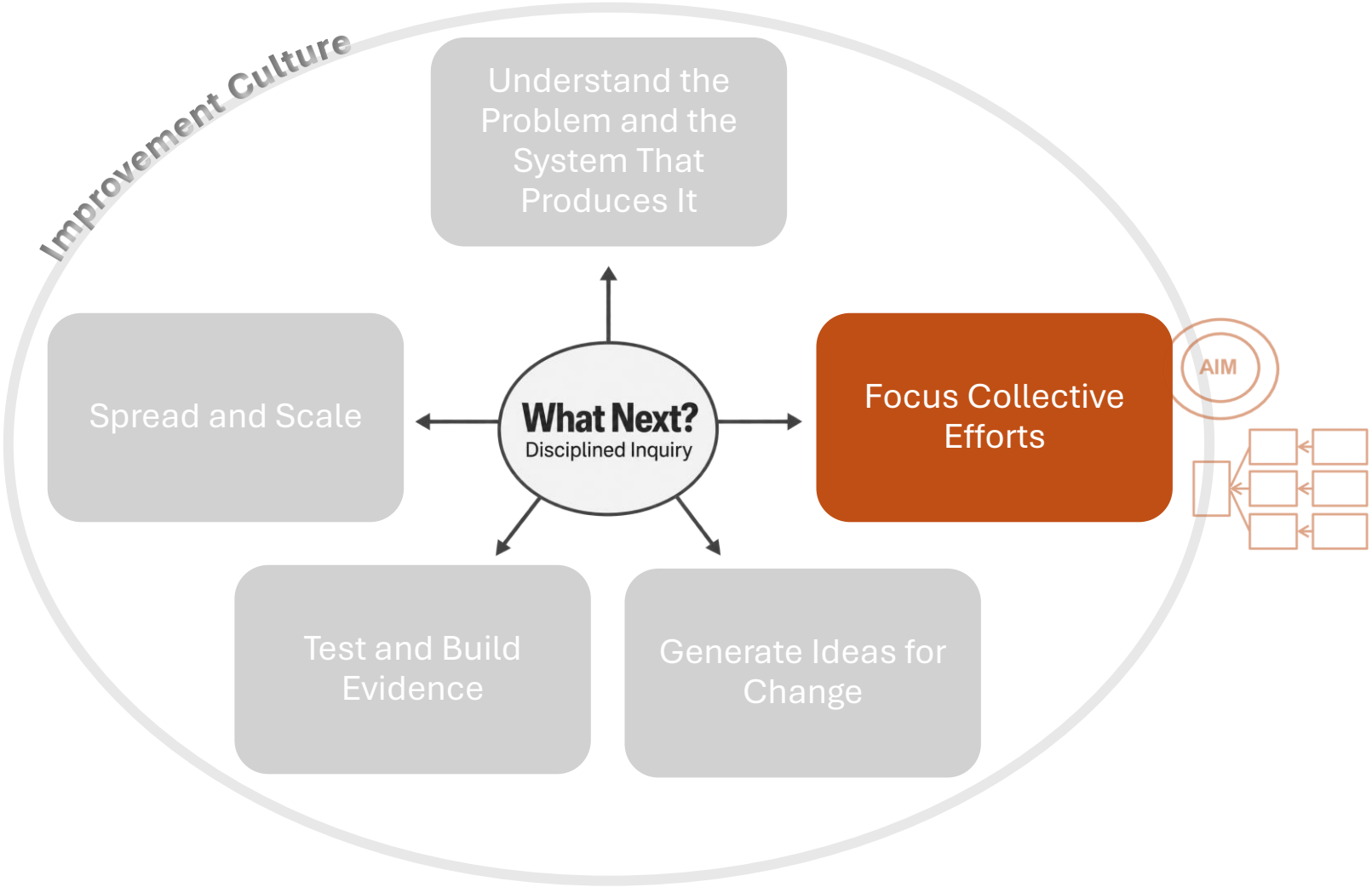
1. Our problem of practice is…
2. What do we need to better understand about this problem and the system producing it?
3. Which tools could help us learn more, and why?

2.1 Assemble a Team Check-In
2.2 Identify an Issue
2.3 Data Analysis Protocol
2.4 5 Whys Protocol
2.5 Fishbone Diagram
2.6 Process Mapping
2.7 Empathy Interviews
2.8 Research and Evidence to Understand the Problem
2.9 Affinity Protocol



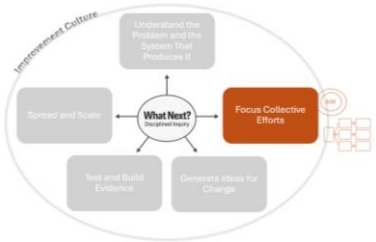
*You do not need to complete the tools. Explore how they could support inquiry and how you might use them to **teach** Phase 1.*

Marci Shepard, PhD, EdD



5-Phases (The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2018). Used with permission.
Improvement Culture (Shepard, 2026)

- **WHAT** are we trying to improve?
- **WHO** will experience the improvement?
- **HOW MUCH** improvement are we aiming for?
- **BY WHEN** do we expect to see it?



Set an Aim

Create a clear, measurable, and time-bound aim statement to guide your team's improvement work.

A good aim gives your team a **clear target**, a way to measure progress, and a timeline—so everyone is working toward the same goal.

What
What will we improve?

- What specific root cause do we want to address?
- What is the problem area or outcome we want to improve?

Who
Who will benefit?

- Who is the target group for this aim?
- Who will benefit from the improvement? (e.g., students, teachers, families, specific grade level)

How much and how measured
How will we know we are making improvement?

- What does improvement look like (from baseline to goal)?
- How will we measure progress? (e.g., metric, data source, frequency)

By when
When will we meet the aim?

- What is a realistic and time-bound timeline?
- When do we plan to achieve this aim?

Put it all together
Write your aim statement using all of the components.

- A complete aim statement includes: what, who, how much and how measured, and by when.
- It should be clear, focused, measurable, and achievable.

Aim Statement Template

By [when], we will improve [what/root cause] for [who/target group] from [baseline data] to [goal data] as measured by [how we will track improvement].

By _____when_____, we will improve _____what_____ for _____who_____ from _____baseline_____ to _____goal_____ as measured by _____measure_____.

Appendix 2.10 | *Where the Science of Improvement Meets the Heart of Leadership* (Shepard, 2026)

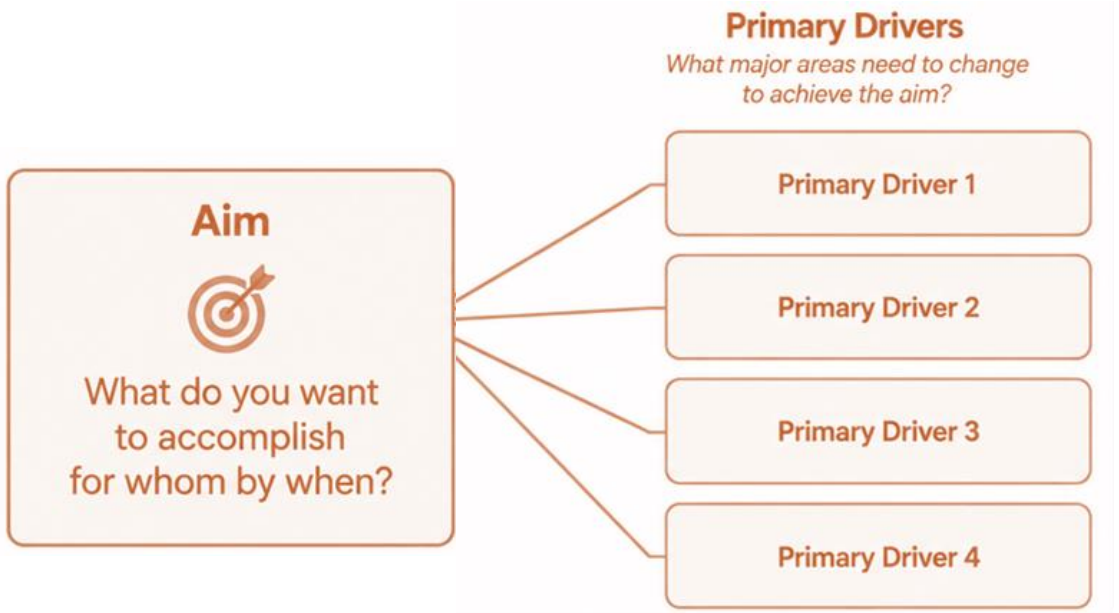
Appendix 2.10

What needs to change for us to achieve our aim?

Driver Diagram

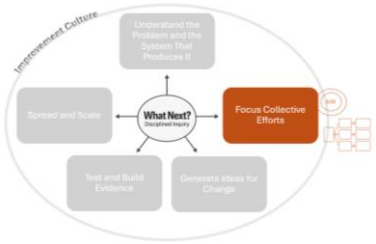
What do we already know? (Drivers)

Identify the key areas of the system that need to change to achieve your aim. For now, focus only on the aim and primary drivers.



Steps to Create This Diagram

1. **Start with your aim**
   Write a clear, measurable, time-bound aim statement using your team's template (e.g., By when, we will improve what, for whom...).
2. **Identify primary drivers**
   List the key areas of the system that need to change to achieve your aim (usually 2–4).
3. **Check your logic**
   Make sure each driver is something your team can influence and is necessary to achieve the aim.



A working theory of action
Your driver diagram organizes what you know and will evolve as you test ideas and learn more.

Appendix 2.11 | *Where the Science of Improvement Meets the Heart of Leadership* (Shepard, 2026)

Marci Shepard, PhD, EdD

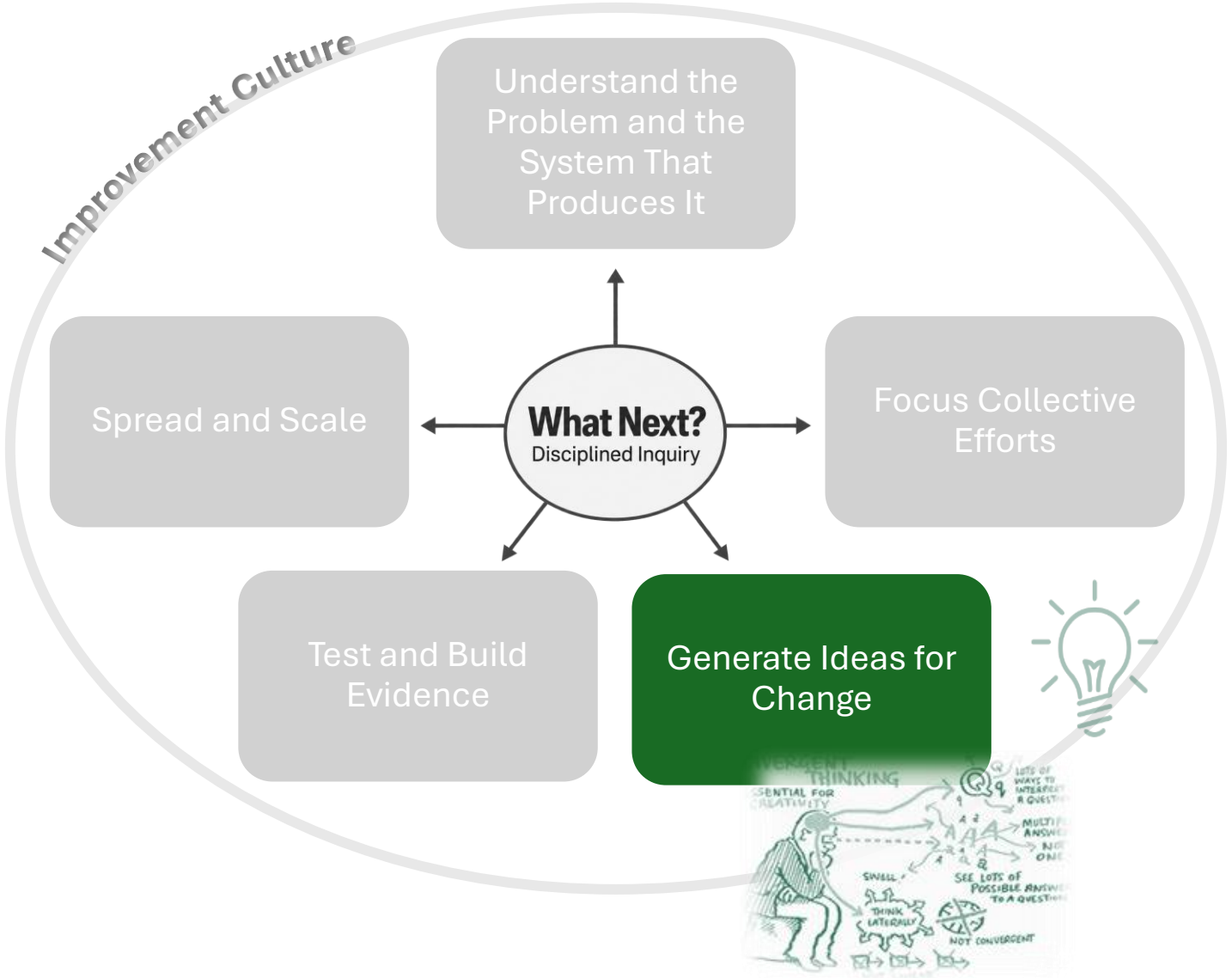
Appendix 2.11



Jot down 2-4 possible drivers for your aim.

Note: Your Phase 1 tools should inform these.

Hint: Look at the clusters/labels from your Affinity Protocol.



5-Phases (The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2018). Used with permission.
Improvement Culture (Shepard, 2026)

Change Ideas

Now, let's do something about it!



1 Research

What does academic literature have to say about solving this problem?

- Look for evidence-based strategies.
- Identify what works in similar contexts.
- Note relevant practices and interventions.

2 Practice

What have others tried to solve this problem?

- Learn from other schools or districts.
- Consider practitioner resources.
- Look for real-world examples and case studies.

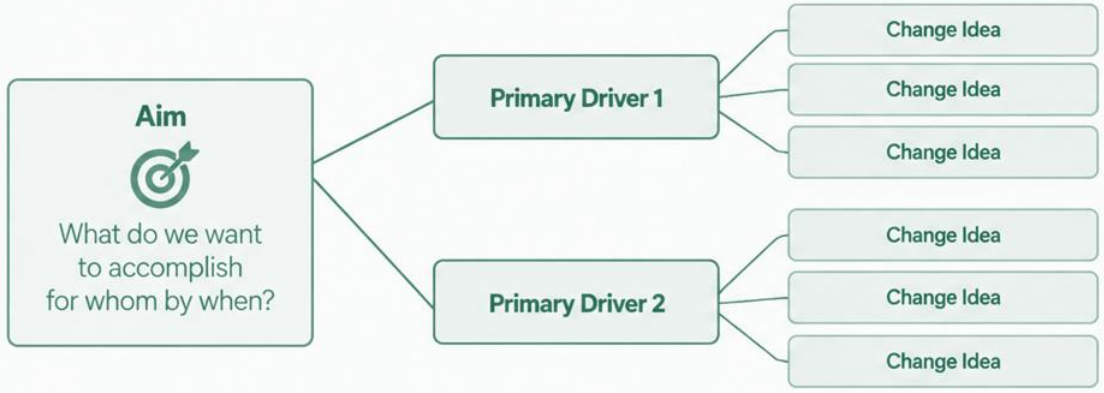
3 Design

What new solutions might address this problem?

- Generate creative or locally personalized ideas.
- Consider small, testable changes.
- Build on research and practice insights.

Add Change Ideas to Your Driver Diagram

Place each change idea under the driver it supports. For now, focus on ideas that could disrupt the status quo and influence one or more drivers.

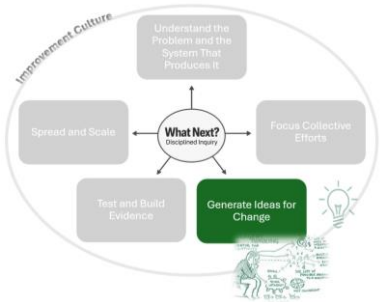


Select a Change Idea to Test First

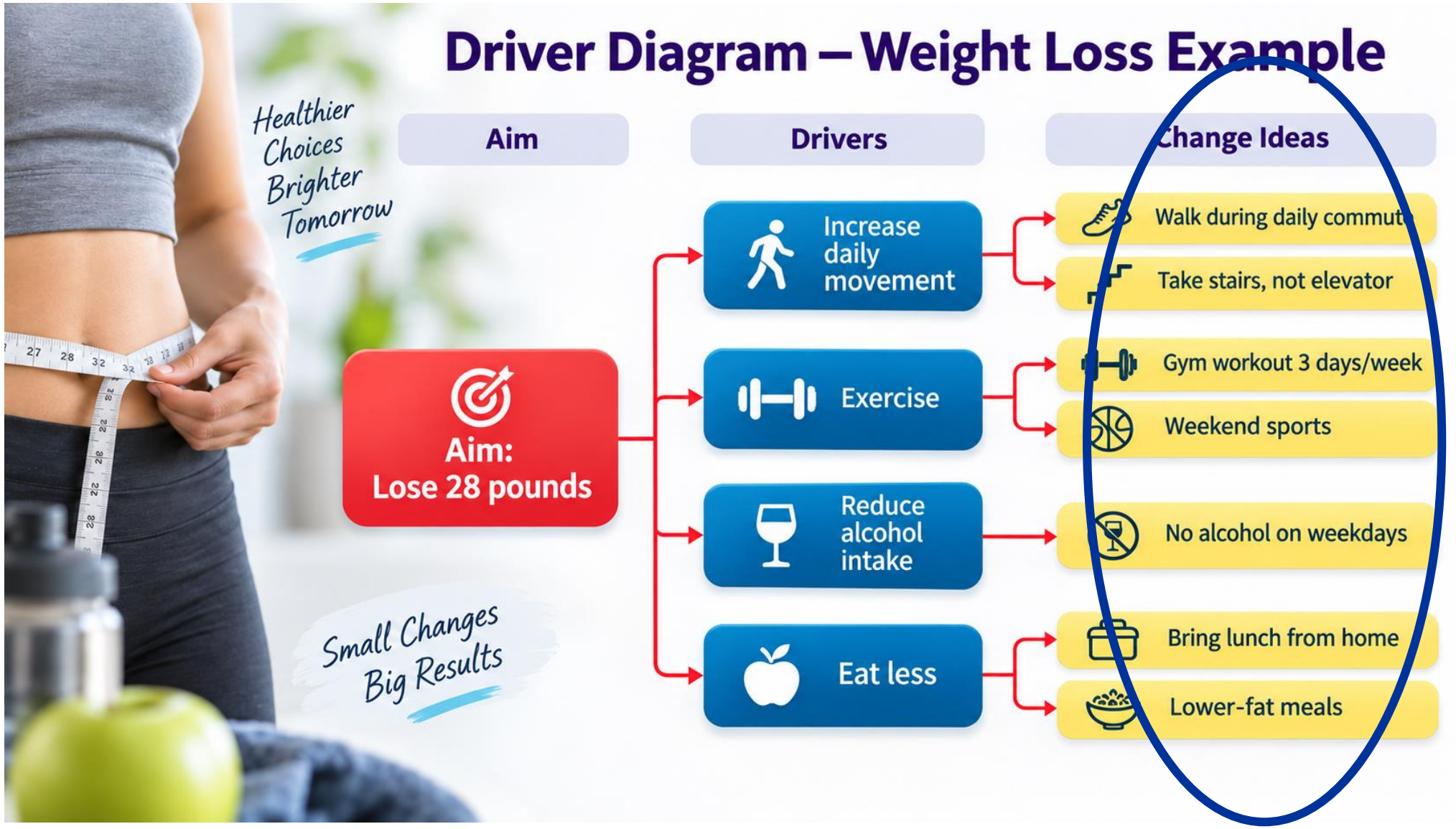
Not all ideas can be tested at once. Evaluate your options and choose a high-impact change idea (or bundle) to start testing.

- Is it aligned with a key driver?
- Is it specific, actionable, and measurable?
- What is the potential impact (high, medium, or low)?
- How feasible is it (resources, time, support)?
- Can we learn from it quickly?

Choose the change idea (or bundle) you will test.
We'll add more ideas as we learn in Phase 3.



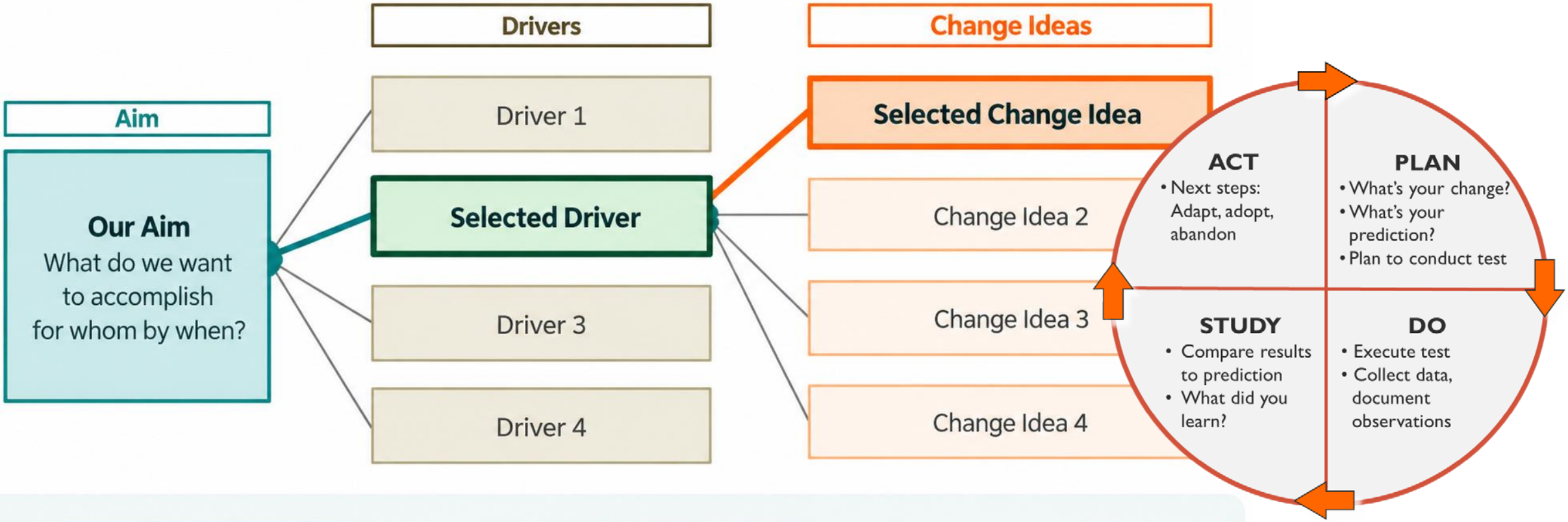
Appendix 2.12


Driver Diagram – Weight Loss Example
Healthier Choices Brighter Tomorrow
Aim
Drivers
Change Ideas
Aim: Lose 28 pounds
Increase daily movement
Walk during daily commute
Take stairs, not elevator
Exercise
Gym workout 3 days/week
Weekend sports
Reduce alcohol intake
No alcohol on weekdays
Eat less
Bring lunch from home
Lower-fat meals
Small Changes Big Results


Possibly wrong,
definitely incomplete…

Theory of Action in a Driver Diagram

A change idea influences a driver, which in turn helps us achieve our aim.



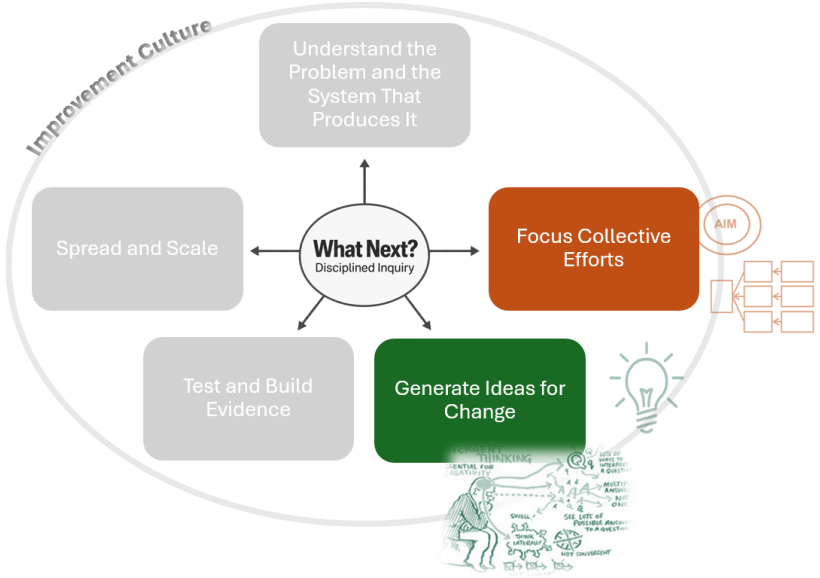
If we **(do this change idea)**, then that will lead to **(this driver)**, which in turn will lead to **(our aim)**

Appendix 2.13

PAUSE 3

Phase 2 & Phase 3:

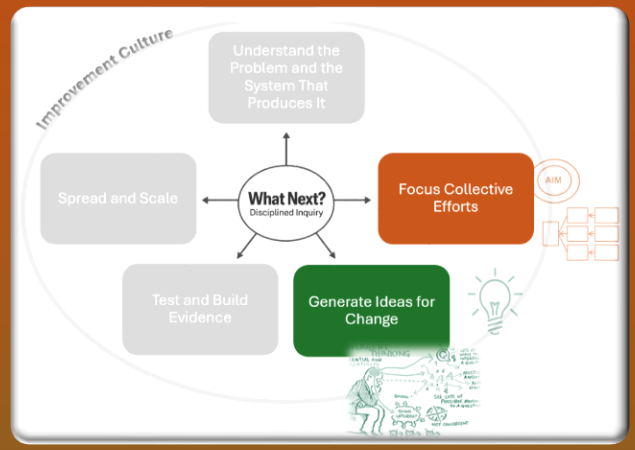
Focus Efforts & Generate Change Ideas



Phase 2 & Phase 3: Focus Efforts & Generate Change Ideas

Explore the tools in your packet. With your table, discuss:

- FOCUS: What specifically might we aim to improve?
- DRIVERS: What conditions or factors might need to change to achieve that aim?
- CHANGE IDEAS: What might we try to influence those drivers?



2.10 Setting an Aim

2.11 Driver Diagram

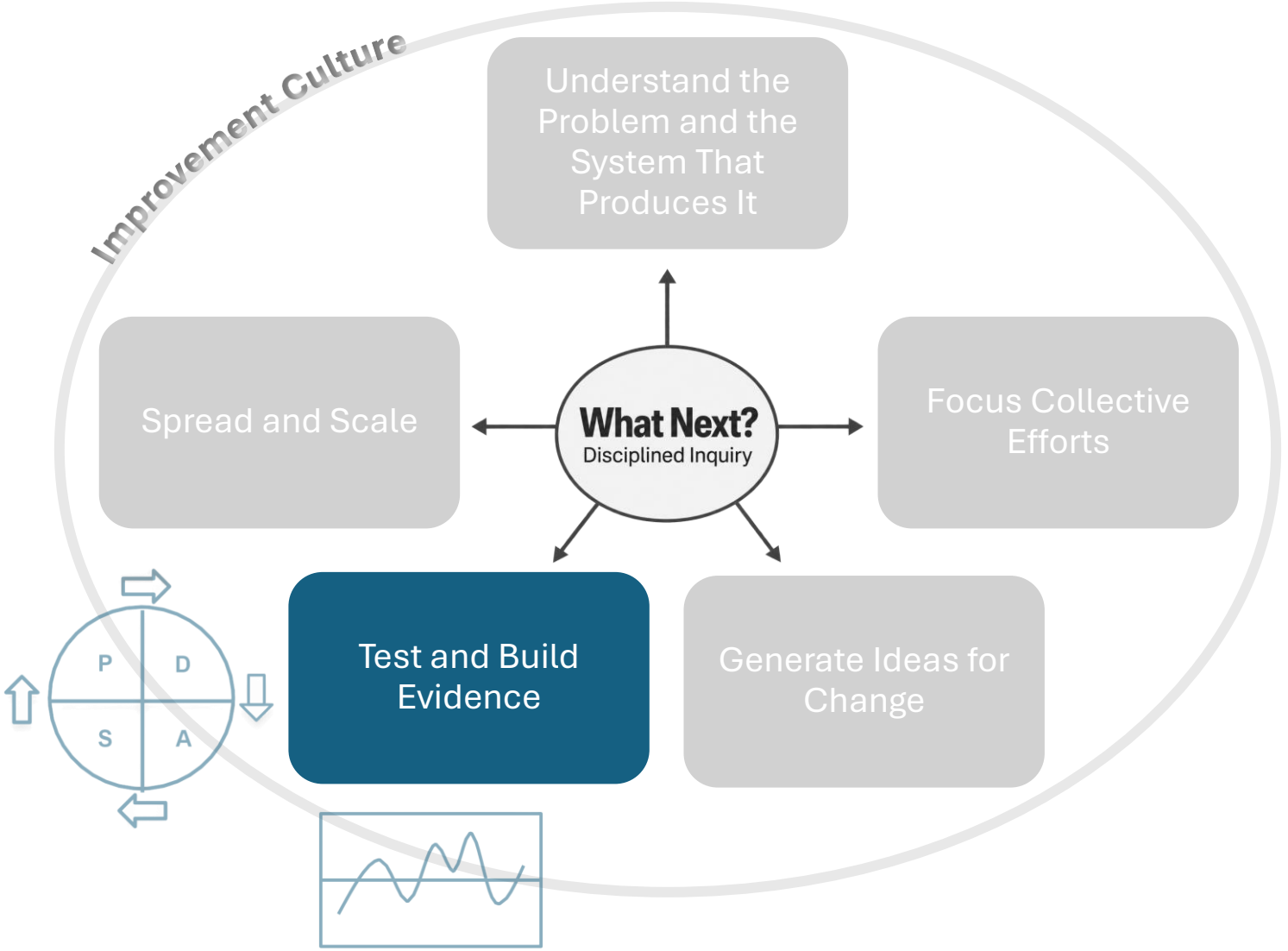
2.12 Change Ideas

2.13 Theory of Action

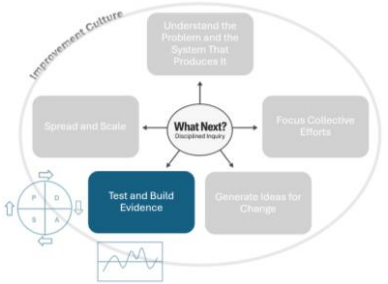


*Consider how Phase 1 findings would inform your decisions and how these tools could be used to **teach** improvement.*

Marci Shepard, PhD, EdD



5-Phases (The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2018). Used with permission.
Improvement Culture (Shepard, 2026)





Appendix 2.17

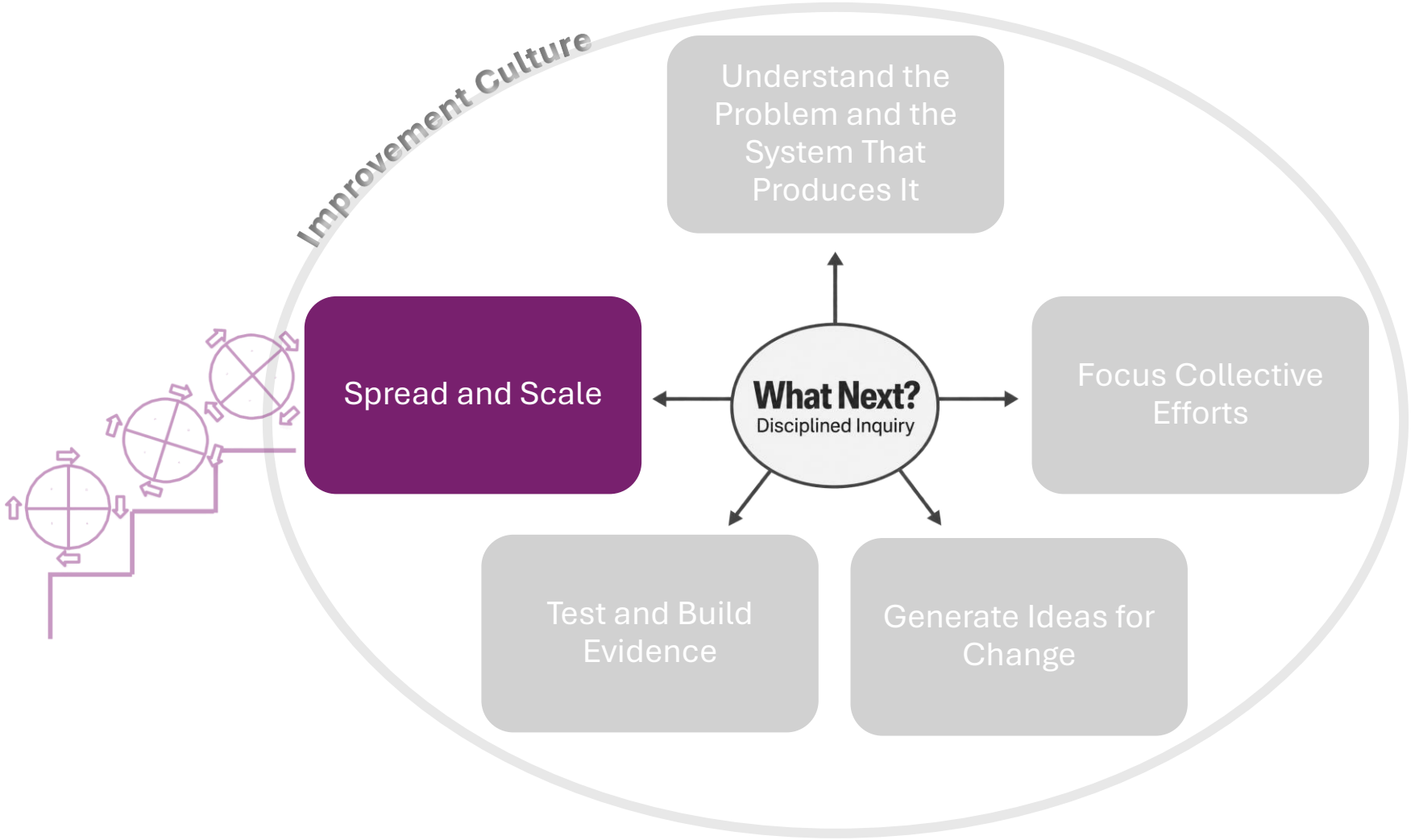
Appendix 2.14

Appendix 2.16

Appendix 2.15

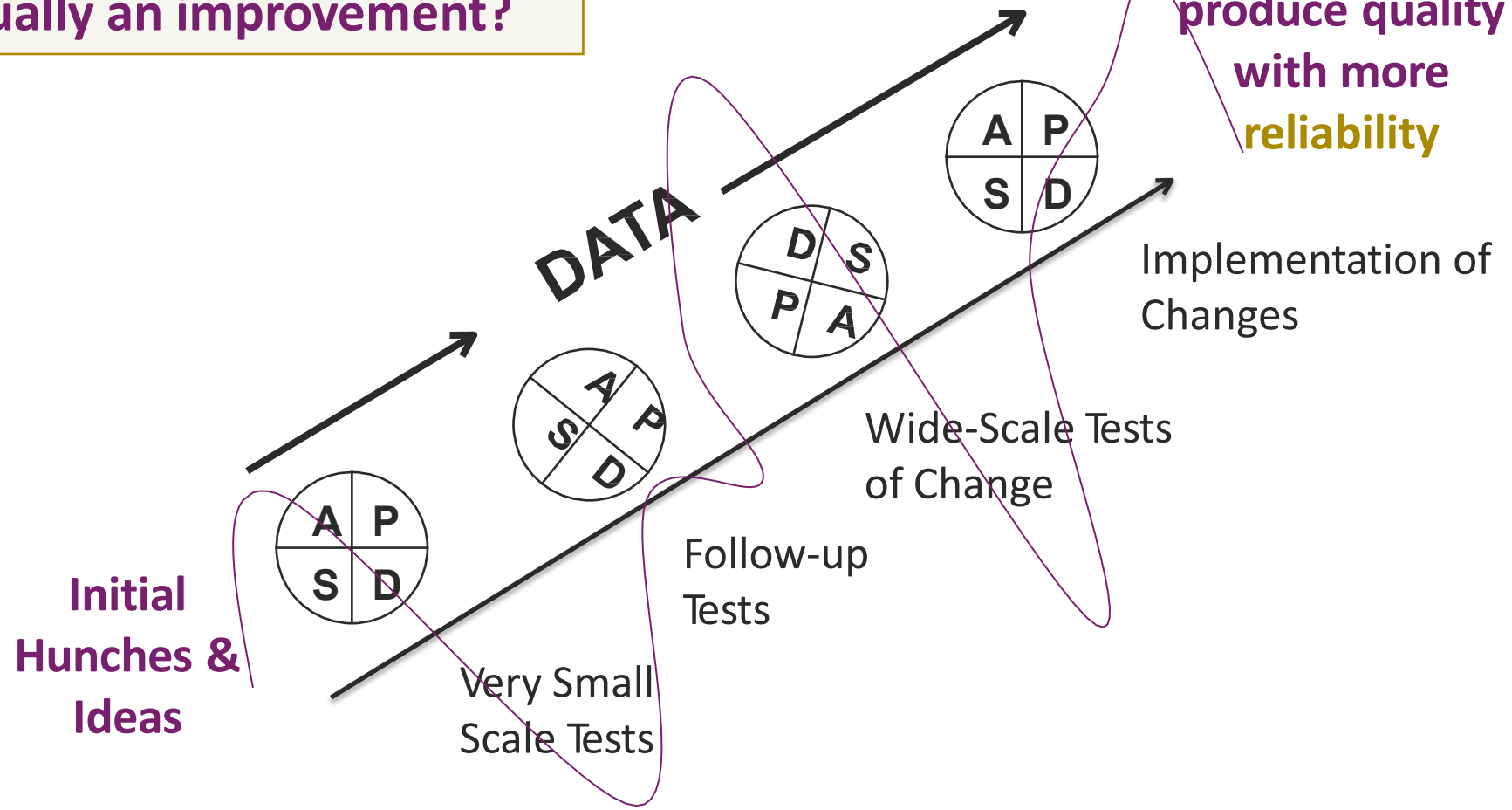
Test small. Learn quickly. Decide what's next.

Marci Shepard, PhD, EdD

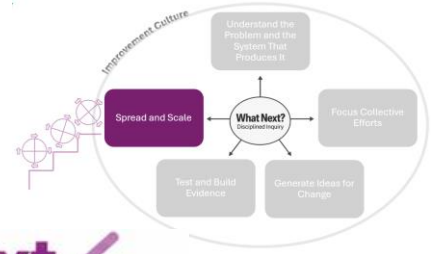


5-Phases (The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2018). Used with permission.
Improvement Culture (Shepard, 2026)

How will we know this change is actually an improvement?



(Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2018)



Are we ready to implement the change?

- Confidence
- Risk
- Readiness
- Scale/context

Spread and Scale: Decide What's Next

Use what you learned to decide if and how to expand the change.

1 Assess Your Confidence

Do you believe this change will lead to improvement?

- ☐ High degree of belief
- ☐ Moderate degree of belief
- ☐ Low degree of belief

2 Consider the Cost of Failure

If this change does not work, what is the potential impact?

- ☐ Large cost of failure (e.g., major disruption)
- ☐ Small cost of failure (e.g., minimal disruption, easy to reverse)

3 Identify Your Organization's Commitment

How committed are you to this change?

- ☐ No commitment (exploring the idea)
- ☐ Some commitment (spread by buy-in or ownership)
- ☐ Strong commitment (leadership and staff invested)

4 Determine the Appropriate Spread or Scale

Use your responses to decide the next step.

- ☐ **Very small-scale test** (try with a small group)
- ☐ **Small-scale test** (pilot in one grade, department, or school)
- ☐ **Large-scale test** (expand to multiple schools or grade levels)
- ☐ **Full implementation** (system-wide adoption)

Use your data and context to choose the next step.

Spread what works. Scale for greater impact.

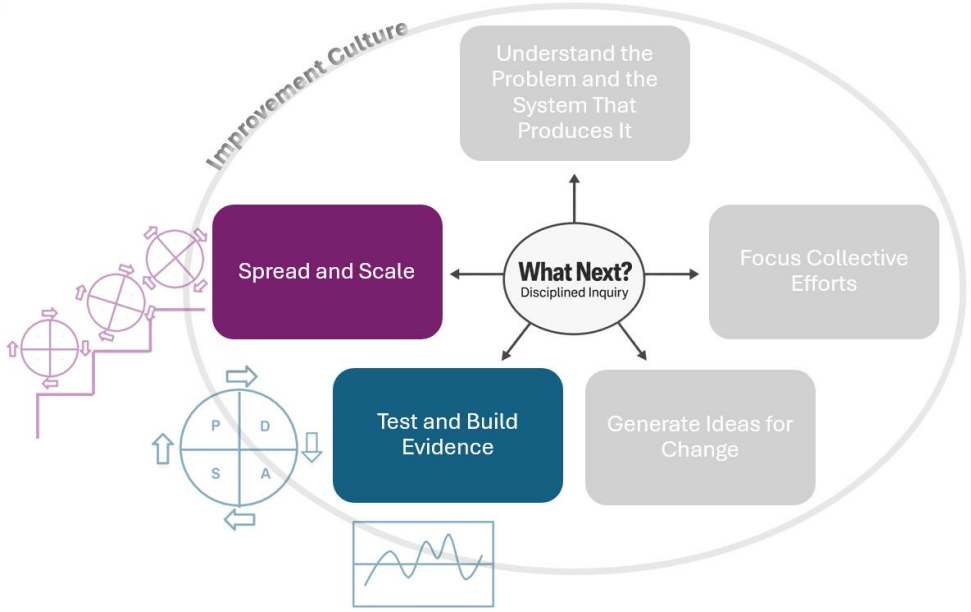
Appendix 2.18 | *Where the Science of Improvement Meets the Heart of Leadership* (Shepard, 2026)

Marci Shepard, PhD, EdD

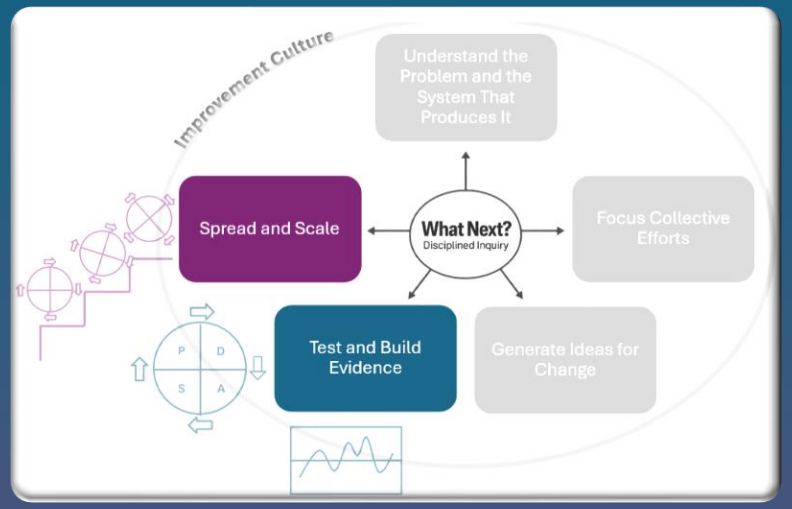
Appendix 2.18

PAUSE 4

Phase 4 & Phase 5:
Test, Learn, Spread, & Scale



Phase 4 & Phase 5: Test, Learn, Spread, & Scale



Explore the tools in your packet. With your table, discuss:

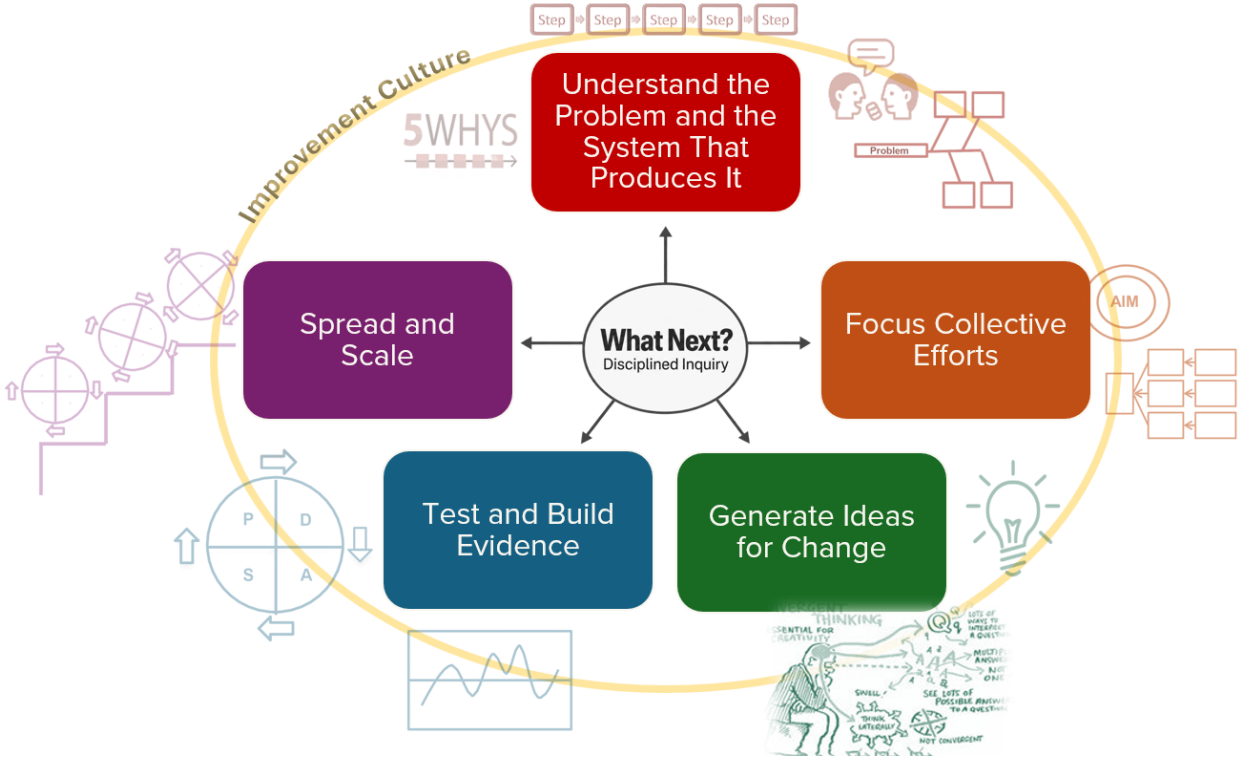
- **TEST:** How could we test one change idea on a small scale?
- **EVIDENCE:** What would we measure or observe to learn whether it resulted in improvement?
- **DECIDE:** How would we use what we learn to adopt, adapt, or abandon the change?
- **SPREAD & SCALE:** What additional evidence, readiness, and conditions would inform decisions about expanding the change?

2.14 PDSA – Plan
2.15 PDSA – Do
2.16 PDSA – Study
2.17 PDSA – Act
2.18 Spread and Scale Decision-Making Tool
2.19 Networked Improvement Community (NIC) Shared Learning Tool to Support



*Which tools would support these decisions? How might you **teach** aspiring leaders to use them?*

Marci Shepard, PhD, EdD



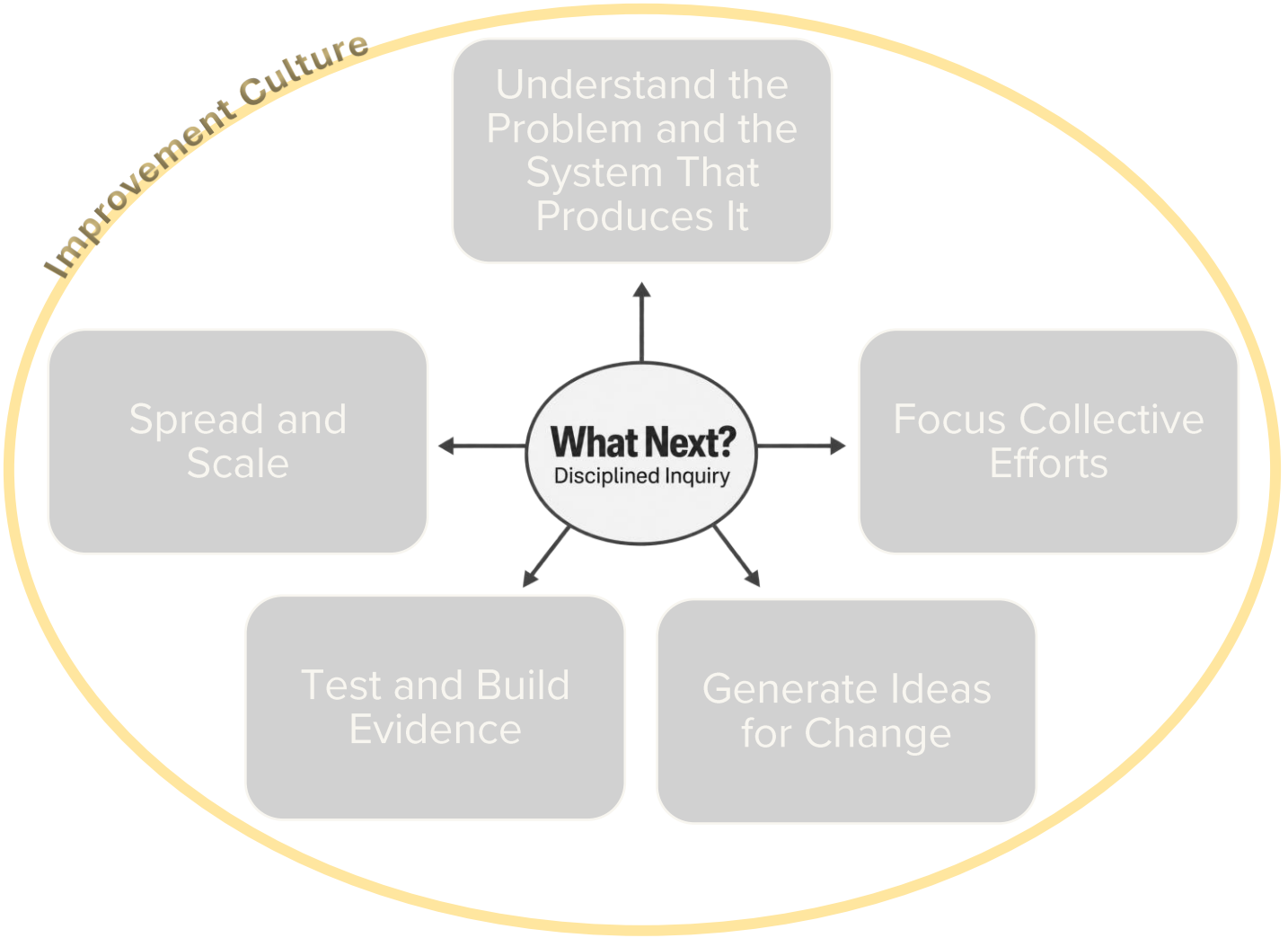
TRY THIS: TOOLS THAT SUPPORT DISCIPLINED INQUIRY

SUPPORT MATERIAL

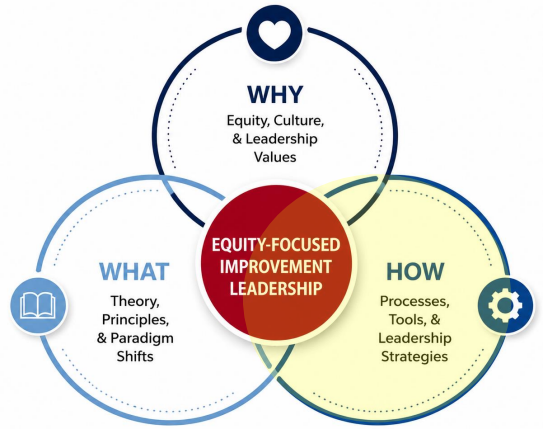
The tools mentioned throughout this chapter to support every phase of the inquiry process are gathered in Appendix 2 for your convenience.

2.1 Assemble a Team Check-In
2.2 Identify an Issue
2.3 Data Analysis Protocol
2.4 5 Whys Protocol
2.5 Fishbone Diagram
2.6 Process Mapping
2.7 Empathy Interviews
2.8 Research and Evidence to Understand the Problem
2.9 Affinity Protocol
2.10 Setting an Aim
2.11 Driver Diagram
2.12 Change Ideas
2.13 Theory of Action
2.14 PDSA – Plan
2.15 PDSA – Do
2.16 PDSA – Study
2.17 PDSA – Act
2.18 Spread and Scale Decision-Making Tool
2.19 Networked Improvement Community (NIC) Shared Learning Tool to Support





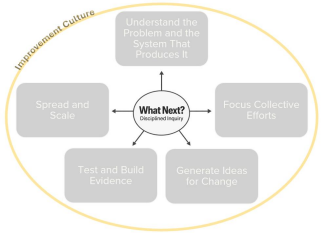
5-Phases (The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2018). Used with permission.
Improvement Culture (Shepard, 2026)



The Other Side of HOW

- Process *and* people matter
  - Workplace culture makes or breaks improvement

Look at Your Improvement Effort Through **Three Workplace Culture Lenses**



VISION & CULTURE

Is there a gap between what we intend and what people experience?

OWNERSHIP

Who owns the improvement work?

VULNERABILITY

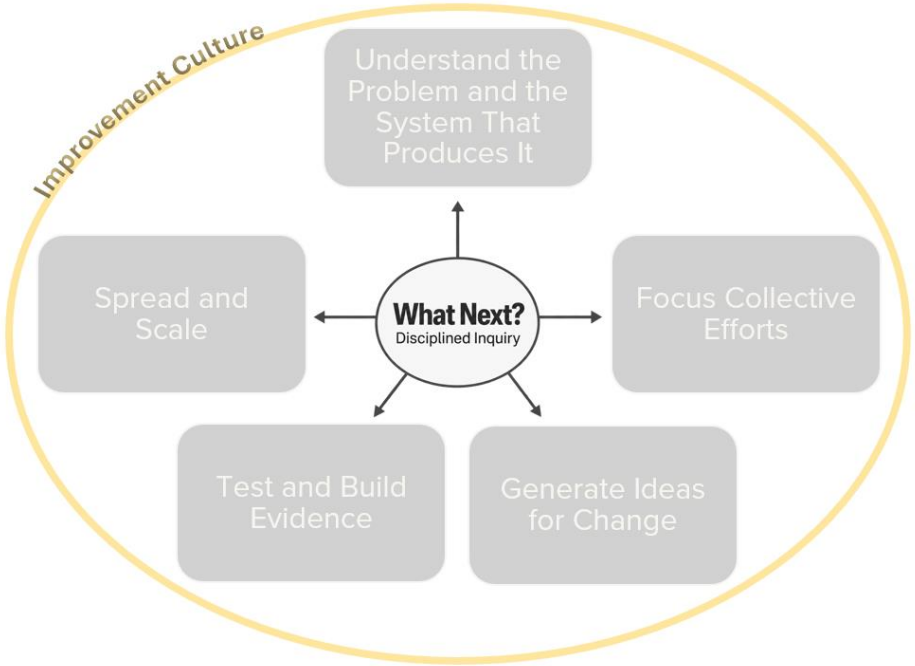
What will people need to risk, reveal, or learn openly?

Teaching Resources: Chapter 7, 8, and 9 Try This

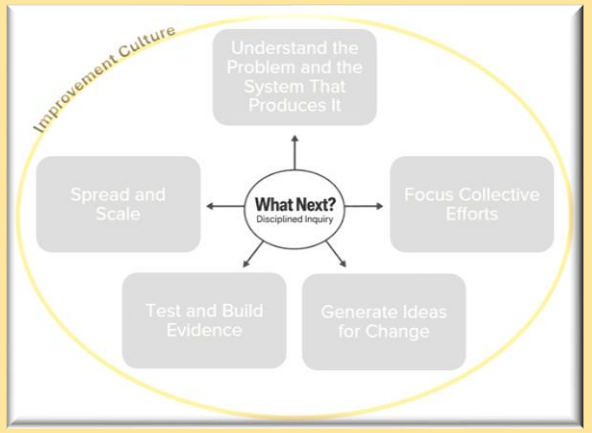
Marci Shepard, PhD, EdD

PAUSE 5

Improvement Culture



Improvement Culture



1. Read the Room.
2. With your table, stand by **one** of the lenses that feels especially relevant to your problem. Discuss:
    - ➢Challenge: What could get in the way?
    - ➢Strategy: What could you intentionally do about it?

VISION & CULTURE

Is there a gap between what we intend and what people experience?

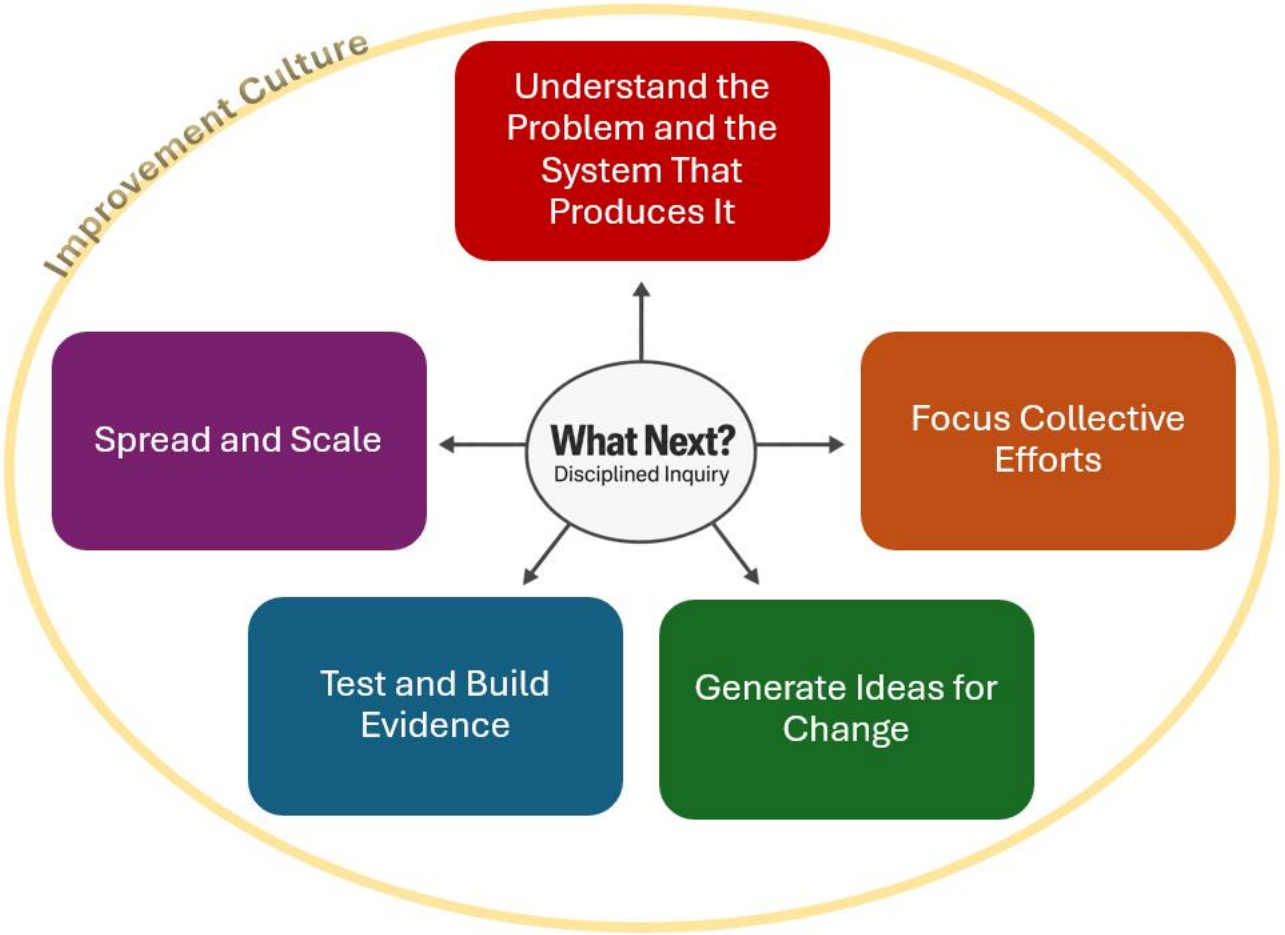
OWNERSHIP

Who owns the improvement work?

VULNERABILITY

What will people need to risk, reveal, or learn openly?

Zooming Out: Leading with a Systems Lens



Leading the System

Closing the Vision–Implementation Gap

CHAPTER 10

> *"We stopped treating improvement science as something staff 'do' and instead made it how we lead every day."*

Bridging Vision and Implementation: Leadership Actions



Embed Improvement into Leadership Culture & Routines

- Do, teach, & lead the work (not assign)
- Use a Theory of Action to connect equity-focused work to the vision
- Make improvement a standing leadership agenda item
- Ensure leadership teams run their own PDSA cycles



Position Equity as the Purpose of Improvement

- Use equity & empathy data to address systemic disparities
- Ensure inquiry cycles system-wide use equity measures
- Establish consistent time & routines to examine impact on *all* students



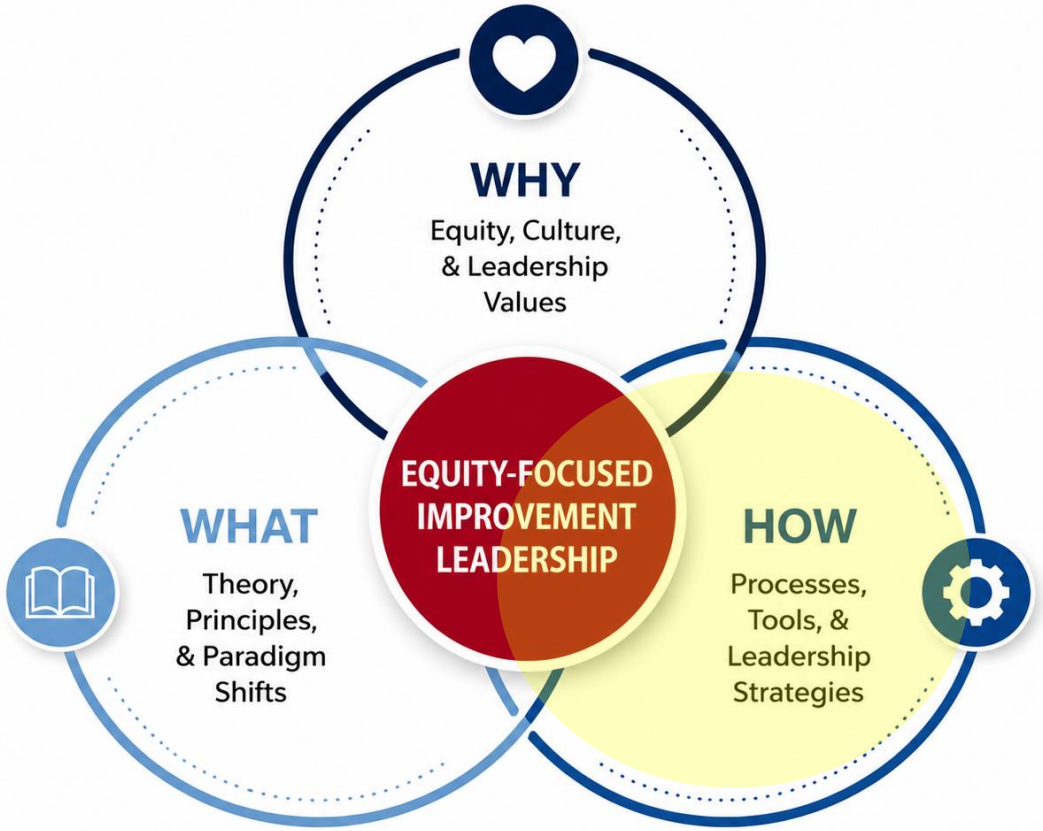
Build System-Wide Structures for Collaboration & Coherence

- Establish cross school & department networks - learning, feedback loops & alignment
- Use cross-system leadership routines: data sharing, learning walks & artifacts
- Develop leadership at all levels via coaching, co-facilitation & mentorship

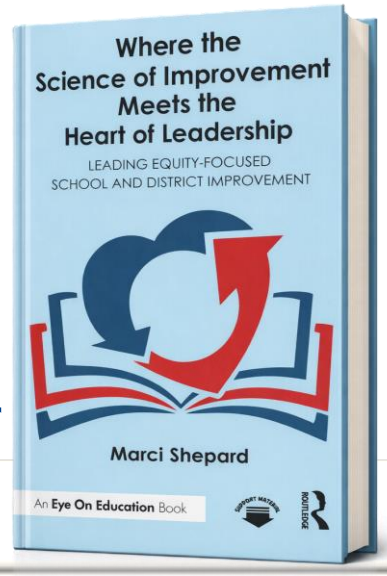
📂 Teaching Resource: Chapter 10 Try This

HOW Teaching Resources Available

How: Chapters 6, 7, 8, 9, 10



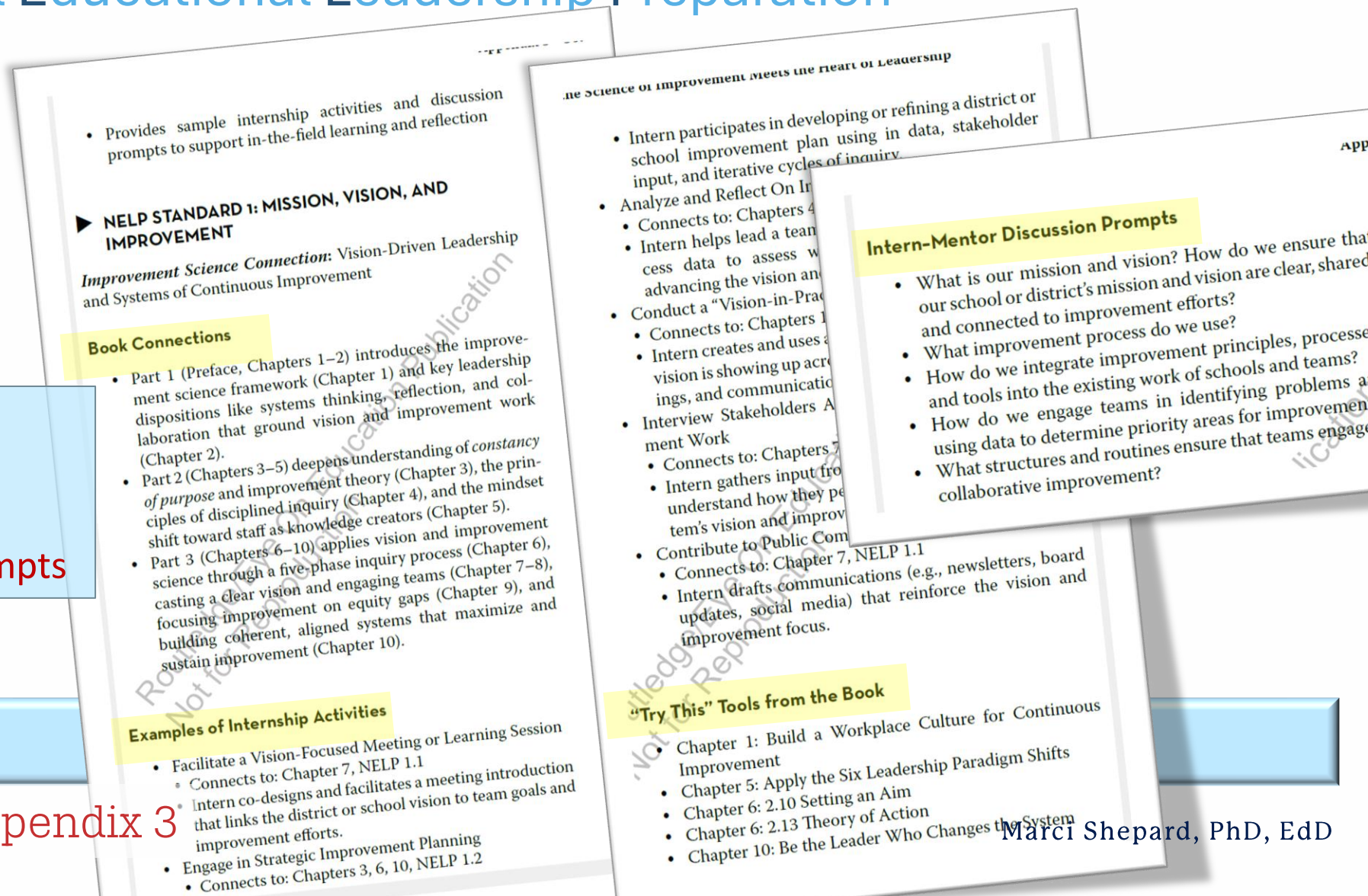
- ✓ HOW PowerPoint
- ✓ Chapter 6 Try This (Appendix 2): 19 tools to support each phase of inquiry
- ✓ Chapter 7 Try This: Deepen a Positive Improvement Culture
- ✓ Chapter 8 Try This: Empower Staff as Improvers *(Ownership)*
- ✓ Chapter 9 Try This: Create Space for Staff Vulnerability
- ✓ Chapter 7-9 Read the Room
- ✓ Chapter 10 Try This: Be the Leader Who Changes the System



Connection to Relevant NELP Standards

National Educational Leadership Preparation

APPENDIX 3



- Provides sample internship activities and discussion prompts to support in-the-field learning and reflection

NELP STANDARD 1: MISSION, VISION, AND IMPROVEMENT

Improvement Science Connection: Vision-Driven Leadership and Systems of Continuous Improvement

Book Connections

- Part 1 (Preface, Chapters 1–2) introduces the improvement science framework (Chapter 1) and key leadership dispositions like systems thinking, reflection, and collaboration that ground vision and improvement work (Chapter 2).
- Part 2 (Chapters 3–5) deepens understanding of *constancy of purpose* and improvement theory (Chapter 3), the principles of disciplined inquiry (Chapter 4), and the mindset shift toward staff as knowledge creators (Chapter 5).
- Part 3 (Chapters 6–10) applies vision and improvement science through a five-phase inquiry process (Chapter 6), casting a clear vision and engaging teams (Chapter 7–8), focusing improvement on equity gaps (Chapter 9), and building coherent, aligned systems that maximize and sustain improvement (Chapter 10).

Examples of Internship Activities

- Facilitate a Vision-Focused Meeting or Learning Session
  - Connects to: Chapter 7, NELP 1.1
  - Intern co-designs and facilitates a meeting introduction that links the district or school vision to team goals and improvement efforts.
- Engage in Strategic Improvement Planning
  - Connects to: Chapters 3, 6, 10, NELP 1.2
  - Intern participates in developing or refining a district or school improvement plan using in data, stakeholder input, and iterative cycles of inquiry.
- Analyze and Reflect On Ir
  - Connects to: Chapters 4
  - Intern helps lead a tean
  - cess data to assess w
  - advancing the vision an
- Conduct a "Vision-in-Prac
  - Connects to: Chapters 1
  - Intern creates and uses a
  - vision is showing up acr
  - ings, and communicatio
- Interview Stakeholders A
  - ment Work
  - Connects to: Chapters 7
  - Intern gathers input fro
  - understand how they pe
  - tem's vision and improv
- Contribute to Public Com
  - Connects to: Chapter 7, NELP 1.1
  - Intern drafts communications (e.g., newsletters, board updates, social media) that reinforce the vision and improvement focus.

"Try This" Tools from the Book

- Chapter 1: Build a Workplace Culture for Continuous Improvement
- Chapter 5: Apply the Six Leadership Paradigm Shifts
- Chapter 6: 2.10 Setting an Aim
- Chapter 6: 2.13 Theory of Action
- Chapter 10: Be the Leader Who Changes the System

Intern-Mentor Discussion Prompts

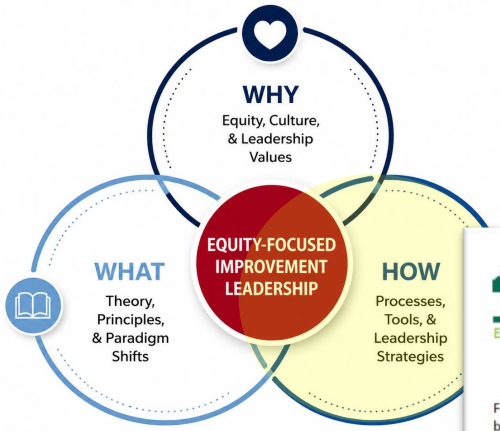
- What is our mission and vision? How do we ensure tha
  our school or district's mission and vision are clear, shared
  and connected to improvement efforts?
- What improvement process do we use?
- How do we integrate improvement principles, processe
  and tools into the existing work of schools and teams?
- How do we engage teams in identifying problems a
  using data to determine priority areas for improvemen
- What structures and routines ensure that teams engag
  collaborative improvement?

NELP-Aligned:

- ✓ Connections to text
- ✓ Internship activities
- ✓ Intern-mentor discussion prompts

🗁 Teaching Resource: Appendix 3

Marci Shepard, PhD, EdD



Teaching Artifacts

APPENDIX 2 CHAPTER 6

OHIO UNIVERSITY

EDLE 6815: Mission, Vision, and District Improvement Marci Shepard, PhD, EdD NELP Standards 3 & 4

Leading Collaborative Continuous Improvement

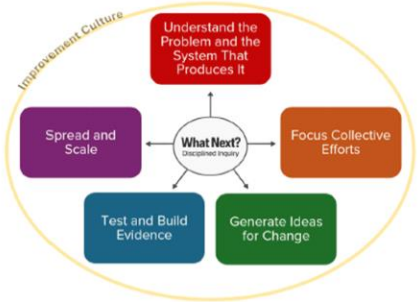
For this project, you will lead an equity-focused district improvement effort by applying disciplined inquiry, evidence-based decision-making, and systems thinking to improve outcomes.

Working within a real district, you will assume the role of superintendent and lead an equity-focused instructional improvement effort. You will evaluate district instructional and cultural systems, identify a student-outcomes-focused instructional equity challenge, determine root causes, establish a measurable improvement aim, develop change ideas, simulate a Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle, plan for district-wide equitable spread and scale, and recommend leadership actions that build an equitable and inclusive system-wide culture for continuous improvement.

This portfolio is designed to reflect the work of a superintendent leading an equity-focused instructional improvement effort.

- Real-World Context (Phases 1–3): Complete Phases 1–3 using a real district or a district with which you are familiar. Use authentic district information to evaluate the instructional system, investigate a student-outcomes-focused instructional equity challenge, and design an improvement strategy.
- Simulation (Phases 4–5 and Building a System-Wide Improvement Culture): Because implementation extends beyond the timeframe of this course, complete Phases 4–5 and Building a System-Wide Improvement Culture as realistic simulations based on the district context, evidence, and improvement design developed in Phases 1–3.

To submit this assignment, save this Word document and work directly in it. Throughout the portfolio, use Chapter 6 of *Where the Science of Improvement Meets the Heart of Leadership: Leading Equity-Focused School and District Improvement* (Shepard, 2026) to understand the step-by-step improvement process, and use Appendix 2 to complete the applicable improvement tools. Depending on the task, you will either summarize your findings within the portfolio or insert an image of the completed tool, as directed. You do **not** need to submit the completed Chapter 6 tools separately.



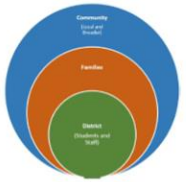
5-Phases (The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2018). Used with permission.
Improvement Culture (Shepard, 2026)

OHIO UNIVERSITY

EDLE 6845: School District Community and Public Relations Marci Shepard, PhD, EdD Assessment for NELP 5.1, 5.2, 5.3

Understand and Improve Engagement and Communication with District, Families, and Community

In this project, you will develop a district and community profile to understand the district, families, and community. You will explore the relationships, communication, collaboration, and engagement within the district and between the district, families, and the local and broader communities. You will find and explore information and data from a variety of sources. Once you have gathered and analyzed information through a profile and communication audit and then conducted a needs assessment, you will better understand the district, families, and community. You will then develop a plan for improved communication and partnerships within the district, with families, and with the community (local and broader) to promote the current and future success and well-being of each student and adult.



Throughout the portfolio, use *Where the Science of Improvement Meets the Heart of Leadership: Leading Equity-Focused School and District Improvement* (Shepard, 2026) as well as Support Materials and Appendix 2 to complete the applicable improvement tools.



5-Phases (The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2018). Used with permission.
Improvement Culture (Shepard, 2026)

Part 1: Understand the System: District, Families, and Community

District and Community Profile (NELP 5.3.1)
Use a variety of data sources to understand the district, families, and community. Provide context for the study by gathering and considering a variety of data, including interviews with diverse stakeholders. Pay attention to trend data when you can get it, as it helps you plan for the future. Some examples of data to gather, understand, and analyze are below. Please include any other data and information that is relevant to your context.

- **District data examples:** Geographic size of the district, district boundaries and maps, bus routes, finance data, number of employees (admin, certificated, classified), organization chart, policies, interagency groups,

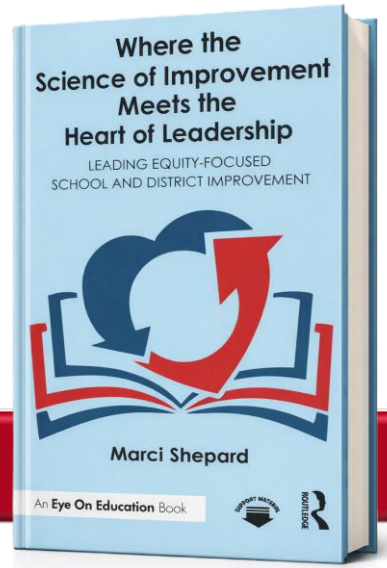


Teaching Resources: Assignment Examples

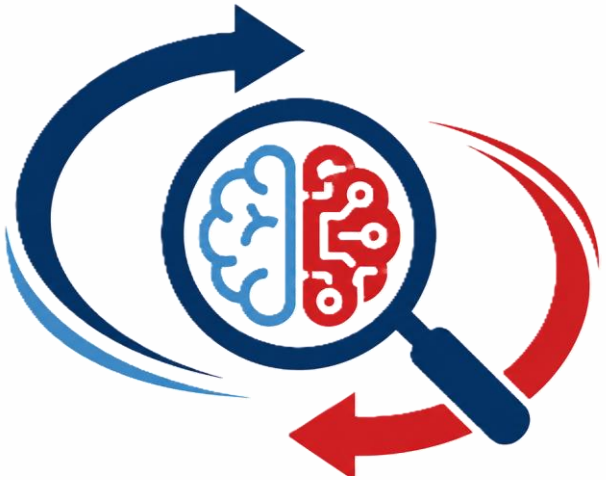
Teaching Resources Available



- ✓ NELP Standards: Learning and Internship Activities
- ✓ Examples of improvement assignments aligned to NELP standards



Human-AI Teaming for Improvement



What's Now

- Collaborative teams engaging in inquiry
- Ownership
- Vulnerability

What's Next

- Human-AI team co-inquiry
- Empowered ownership
- Courageous safety

Still **science of improvement** and **heart of leadership**, but field developing and testing the impact of emerging technologies (including AI) on capacity, access, efficacy, expansive ideas, and timeliness of iterative inquiry (efficiency)

Marci Shepard, PhD, EdD

AI-Enhanced Inquiry – Example from the Field



Marci Shepard, PhD, EdD

ARTICLE

Journal of School Leadership
2026, Vol. 0(0) 1–22
© The Author(s) 2026



Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/10526846261503615
journals.sagepub.com/home/jsl



Leading Equity-Focused School and District Improvement With GenAI: The Human-AI Team Improvement Framework

Marci Shepard[1]



doi: https://doi.org/10.1177/10526846261503615

Abstract

This theoretical paper examines how educational leaders can leverage generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) for equity-focused school and district improvement.

Teaching Resource



Building the Bridge from Theory to Action

Start with One Change Idea

Theory of Action

Change Idea

IF I _____

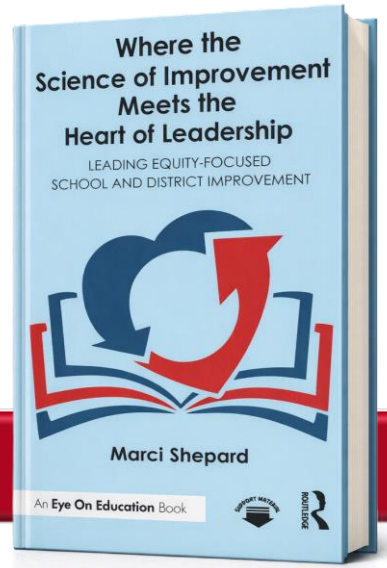
(Choose one idea, tool, or strategy from today's session.)

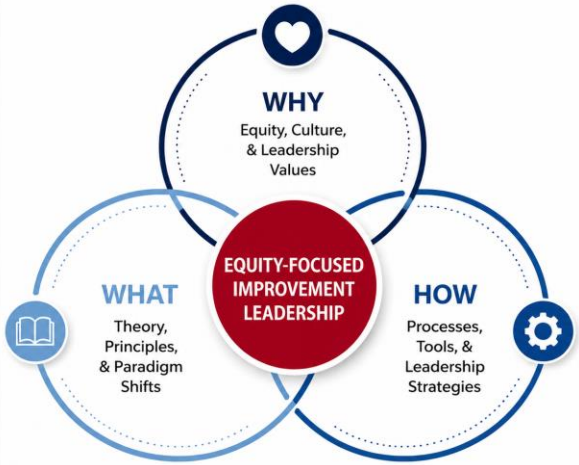
Driver

THAT WILL impact my teaching of improvement leadership

Aim

SO THAT educational leaders are better prepared to lead collaborative continuous improvement.

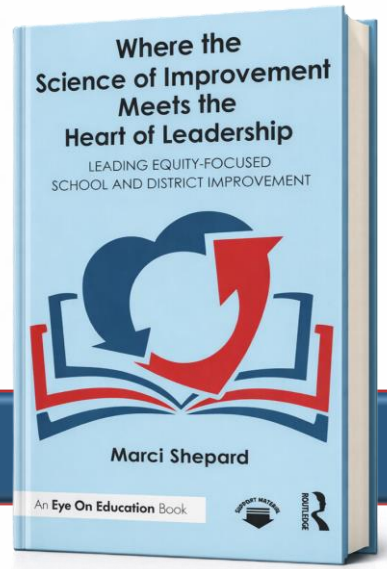




FEEDBACK?

QUESTIONS?

COMMENTS?



"Leaders shape culture. Culture fuels improvement. Equity ensures it matters."

Marci Shepard, PhD, EdD

References

Bryk, A. S., Gomez, L. M., Grunow, A., & LeMahieu, P. G. (2015). *Learning to improve: How America's schools can get better at getting better*. Harvard Education Press.

Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. (2018). *Introduction to improvement science: A learning-by-doing simulation.*

Deming, W. E. (1982). *Out of the crisis*. MIT Press.

Deming, W. E. (1994). *The new economics for industry, government, education* (2nd ed.). MIT Press.

Langley, G. J., Moen, R. D., Nolan, K. M., Nolan, T. W., Norman, C. L., & Provost, L. P. (2009). *The improvement guide: A practical approach to enhancing organizational performance* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Shepard, M. (2026). *Where the science of improvement meets the heart of leadership: Leading equity-focused school and district improvement*. Routledge.