The Bridgespan Group
Collaborating to accelerate social impact

Reimagining Global Operating Models: Choice Points and Key Equity Considerations

Global organizations—both nonprofits and funders—are increasingly asking how they can alter their operating models to center equity and shift voice, decision-making power, and resourcing closer to where their work is happening. Several organizations we work with have embarked on this transformational journey, inspiring us to pursue new research that builds on our previous operating model guidance.

Bridgespan's operating model framework includes four interrelated elements (see exhibit, right) that together act as a bridge between strategy and results. Building or altering this bridge requires numerous decisions spread across the four elements of the framework. We call these "choice points," taking a cue from Race Forward's approach to considering all decisions with equity in mind. Choice points are like forks in the road, where one path is the status quo.[1]

These decisions can each advance—or hinder—power shifts and equity depending upon the choices made. Each of the choice points we offer on the following pages include open-ended questions that invite reflection on critical equity considerations an organization faces as it considers equity among multiple objectives in shifting its global operating model.

We compiled these choice points and equity considerations based on our client work and interviews with more than 35 global organizations. The list below is intended to serve as a resource

Bridgespan's operating model framework guides the design of four interrelated elements that address how organizations:

Structure the organization and distribute responsibilities

Manage your priorities and allocate resources

CENTER STRATEGY AND EQUITY

Build your critical capabilities

Align your leaders, talent, and culture

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1   Choice points are defined by Race Forward as "decision-making opportunities that influence outcomes." The cumulative impacts of many small choices can be as significant as the impact of big decisions. Choice points are opportunities for leaders to reflect, generate options, and act on decisions in a way that promotes racial equity and inclusion. (See The Management Center and Terry Keleher, "Using Choice Points to Advance Racial Equity and Inclusion," The Management Center, November 2021.)

for organizations that are assessing, designing, or redesigning aspects of their operating models. There is no right answer for any choice point. Answers will vary based on an organization's context and strategy. Our hope is that this list will help guide organizations as they consider how to align their operating models with their goals around power and equity. See *Reimagining Global Operating Models: Steps Multi-Country Organizations Are Taking to Advance Equity and Shift Power Locally* for trends and reflections from organizations on this journey.

Structure the organization and distribute responsibilities

Choice points	Equity considerations
What is the organization's **overall structure** (e.g., matrix, hub-and-spoke, network)?	• How are accountability and decision-making power distributed among key units? • How does the structure challenge power dynamics based on where people are grouped or distributed?
What is the **role of the center** (e.g., setting direction, supporting, facilitating)?	• How does it enable equitable access to information, knowledge, and resources? • How are central roles defined? Is the burden of proof sufficiently high for centralizing the roles versus localizing them?
Where are the organization's **central roles located** (e.g., in a Global North or Global South headquarters, in hubs, distributed by function or role, location-agnostic)?	• How do these locations ensure work, decisions, policies, and guidelines made centrally are informed by local context(s) and understanding? • How do they ensure equitable access for all to leadership and support? • How does the location of central roles reinforce or challenge power dynamics (e.g., concentration of power, Global North/South power dynamics)? • Does the location of central roles enable the hiring and development of local and diverse talent? • Where is the headquarters registered? To what extent does the location reinforce or mitigate existing power imbalances?
Which **key decisions** are assigned to local teams versus the center (e.g., programmatic strategies, investment decisions, budgets)?	• Are decisions made by people who have the right mix of expertise and local knowledge? • How are decision makers in local teams supported to best make the decisions they are responsible for? • For decisions held by central roles or global leadership, how does the decision framework empower proximate individuals across local teams to contribute to key decisions?[2]

2   Mike Ciccarone, Preeta Nayak, Yonatan Araia, and Bradley Seeman, "Five Ways That Nonprofits Can Make Decision Making More Inclusive—and More Effective," The Bridgespan Group, January 13, 2022.

Manage your priorities and allocate resources

Choice points	Equity considerations
What are the **leadership forums** at the executive level and below, and what is the **composition and role** of each?	• How do these forums include and elevate proximate voices and lived experiences? • How are decisions delegated to forums below the executive level? • How do these forums clarify roles and create norms of engagement among members to manage power dynamics? • What forums are specifically tasked with advancing equity?
What is the **composition and role of boards**?	• How do boards include and elevate proximate voices and lived experiences?
What are the organization's **measures of success** that are used to inform strategy, prioritization, and resource allocation?	• How, and to what degree, do these measures of success highlight local work and elevate it as integral to organization-wide success? • How are regional measures of success contextualized appropriately to each local team, while aligning with organizational vision?
What **strategic planning processes** are in place to prioritize opportunities and decide resource allocation?	• How do the planning processes include and elevate perspectives and requirements of proximate voices in the organization? • Are the planning and review processes accessible for all key internal stakeholders (e.g., in terms of language, technology, and formats used)?

Build your critical capabilities

Choice points	Equity considerations
Which **strategic capabilities** does the organization invest in (e.g., specific program areas, advocacy, research, learning)?	• How do prioritized capabilities balance global and local team needs? • For global capabilities, how are local voices informing the development? • How does the approach to building strategic capabilities support building local capacity over time (or not)?
What **investments in processes, technology, and data** is the organization making to build its critical capabilities?	• Does the design of processes optimize for all who need to engage? • Does the selection of technology investments optimize for all users (and any of their relevant constraints)? • How do these investments enable better and more equitable information flows and transparency throughout the organization, including to equip those closest to the work?
What **partners does the organization work with** instead of building internal capabilities (e.g., contracting, regranting, informally partnering)?	• How are partners selected, and how does the selection ensure partners have local context and leadership? • How do these partnerships support or build the capabilities of local organizations?
What capability does the organization have specifically for **building and promoting equity** (e.g., having an internal diversity, equity, and inclusion or decolonization team or working group)?	• How are equity capabilities customized to support local and country-specific context? • Is there sufficient resourcing dedicated for this work to build equity across the organization as well as local teams? • How is employee feedback on equity work and capabilities solicited and incorporated? • Where are external audits and supports used to pressure-test, validate, and strengthen capabilities?

Align your leaders, talent, and culture

Choice points	Equity considerations
What are the **values and norms** of the organization, and how do they translate into the **organizational culture** (e.g., decision behaviors, leadership behaviors)?	• To what extent does the organization's culture allow for or integrate different working norms across geographies (e.g., differences in cultural decision styles)? • What are the systems to address behaviors that reinforce harmful power structures (e.g., microaggressions, micromanagement), and to resolve conflicts? • How does the culture safeguard employees' psychological safety to encourage engagement and input by all (e.g., providing feedback, collaborating with different members)? What systems are in place to ensure this?
What are the **compensation structures and policies**, including benefits?	• How transparent are compensation standards across the organization? • How does the compensation structure ensure equitable compensation for similar roles across geographies? • How are local compensation decisions made? • How might the compensation structure alter local talent markets?
What are the **recruitment standards and processes**?	• How do they invest in the development of local talent? • How do they diversify search for talent beyond the usual spaces and platforms (e.g., LinkedIn, well-known international or national universities)? • How do they account for cultural nuances, including recognizing and minimizing biases for determining fit (e.g., education levels and institutions, expertise)?
What are the **performance-management standards and policies**? What mechanisms are in place to develop talent?	• How transparent are performance-management standards? • How do they challenge dominant-culture performance norms and account for cultural nuances? • How are equity competencies considered in talent development? • How do investments to support talent recognize historical context and constraints for marginalized communities?
What mechanisms are in place to enable **cross-organizational learning and collaboration**?	• How do these mechanisms challenge traditional power dynamics and create space for proximate voices? • How do they ensure equitable access to knowledge, information, and learning? • How do they build equitable working conditions that challenge harmful power dynamics (e.g., late-night meetings across time zones, information sharing in dominant language)?