

Resilient Leadership Systems

Session Objectives

By the end of this session, you will:



Diagnose where decision-making bottlenecks and fragility signals are concentrated in your organization



Identify common bottleneck types and use three diagnostic questions to pinpoint your highest-leverage fix



Commit to one smallest test you can run in 2 weeks to reduce ED dependency on a key decision

Signals of Fragility

- **Bottlenecks + unclear authority**
 - *e.g., Every grant budget must be approved by the ED, even renewals*
- **Knowledge held by one person**
 - *e.g., Only one staff member knows how to run payroll or file the 990*
- **Inequitable workload/voice**
 - *e.g., One director manages community relationships, DEI work, and translations—without extra authority or pay*
- **Unclear succession**
 - *e.g., The board hasn't discussed who would step in if the ED left tomorrow*

Pulse Check

Open your handout

Where does your organization feel most resilient?

e.g., fundraising, board governance, team culture, program delivery, communications

Where does your organization feel most fragile?

e.g., succession planning, decision-making, staff retention, financial reserves, compliance

Bottlenecks + Equity Risks (ED/SLT) –

Ask yourself – does the bottleneck protect quality or just compensate for missing clarity or confidence?

1. ED approval bottlenecks
2. Finance/HR “single point of failure”
3. Relationship bottlenecks (one fundraiser/partner lead)
4. SLT forum bottlenecks (everything routed to one meeting)
5. Emotional bottlenecks (one conflict-holder)

Equity lens — ask yourself the following, and then address:

- *Who carries invisible labor?*
- *Who has authority without support?*
- *Whose expertise is discounted?*

Open your handout

Fast Diagnosis (3 Questions)

Open your handout



What do we avoid talking about?

e.g., The board hasn't discussed ED succession, even though the ED plans to leave in 18 months



Where are people afraid to decide?

e.g., Staff won't approve routine vendor contracts without ED sign-off because criteria aren't clear



Where does work revert upward?

e.g., Directors draft budgets but the ED rewrites them—so the team stops owning the process

Discussion: Your Biggest Bottleneck

- In pairs: **Pick one decision that keeps coming back to you. Name the bottleneck type. Then identify your “smallest test” using the handout.**
- **Smallest test** = a single, low-risk experiment that shifts one decision role, clarifies one piece of authority, or removes one unnecessary approval step

Example smallest tests:

- Directors approve grant renewals under \$10K without ED sign-off
- Publish written decision criteria for one recurring hiring decision
- Let program directors decide and report out, instead of routing through SLT

Open your handout in your pairs to reference instructions

Commitments 2 – Weeks

One step I'll take in 2 weeks

Make it specific:
“I will ___ by ___”

Open your handout

Recap – Build the System, Not Just the Leader

- Fragility signals tell you where to look
- Name the bottleneck type + equity risks, not just symptoms
- Use the 3 diagnostic questions as a regular check-in
- Run your smallest test in 2 weeks
- Find an accountability partner before you leave!



Thank you!

Ali Carella, Ph.D.
carella@lapiana.org

Humberto Camarena
camarena@lapiana.org

La Piana
DRIVING SOCIAL IMPACT since 1998