

Districts as Change Agents: Levers for System-Wide Instructional Improvement

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The Research

- Part of CTP core study of teaching policy environments in four states: California, New York, North Carolina, Washington
- Case studies of “reforming districts”:
 - 4 large urban districts in core study states
 - 4 mid-sized districts in California’s Bay Area
- Data:
 - 4 years of district interviews, observations, record data
 - 3 years of school case study data (2-3 schools / district)
 - Survey data (2001-02) for teachers and principals

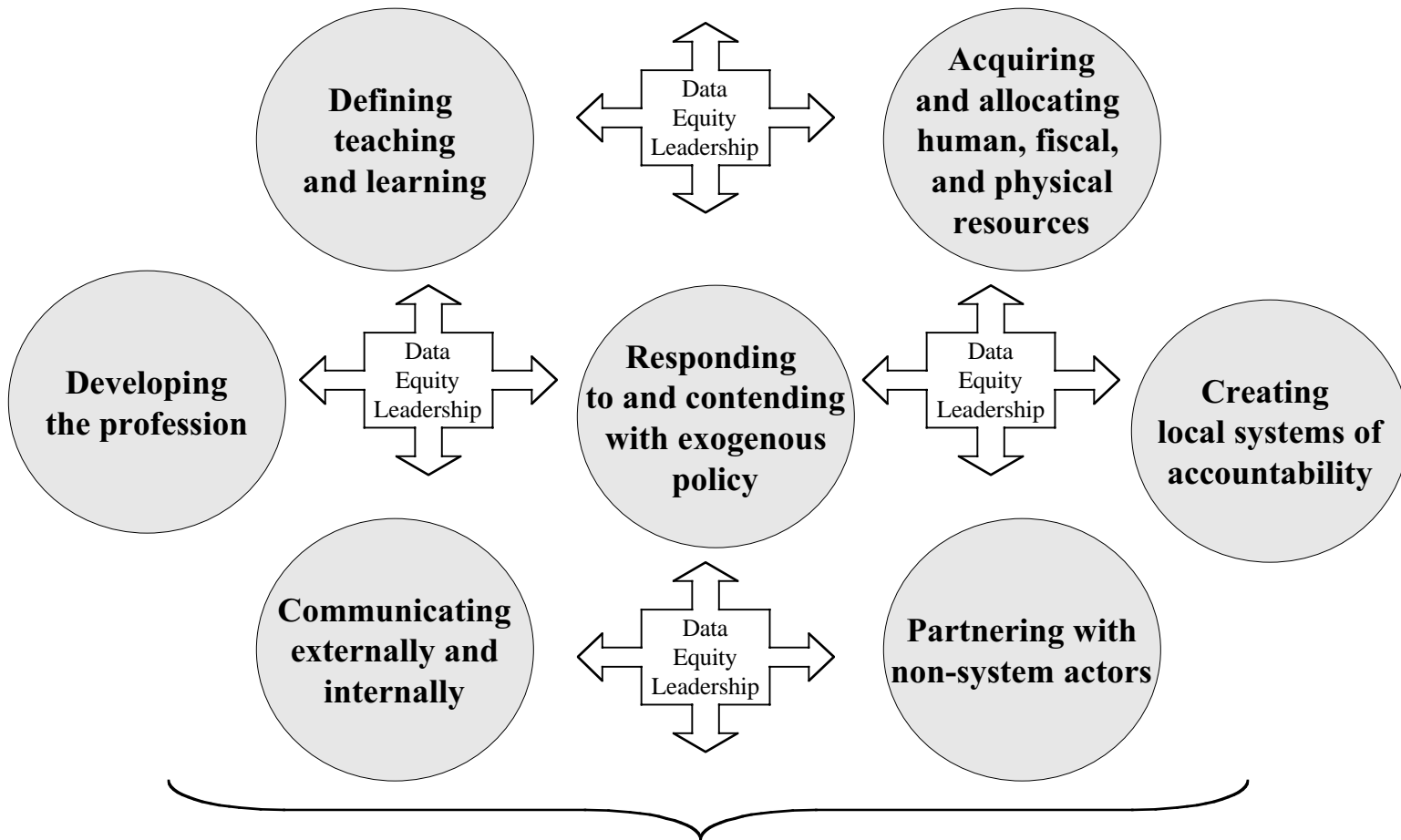


Overview of Results

- Grounded analytic framework: Domains of district action are levers for system-wide instructional improvement
- Cases of “reforming” districts illustrate alternative system strategies for change
- Data, focus on equity, and leadership are critical, cross-cutting levers for district reform



Domains of District Action



Quality: Coherence, Professionalism / Learning Community, System-wide Equity, Sustainability



District Quality: Desired System Outcomes

- Policy and action across domains is *coherent*
- *Professionalism and learning community* are pervasive at all system levels
- *Equitable and enhanced student learning outcomes* across and within district schools
- Strategic district action is *sustainable*



Defining Teaching and Learning

Reforming districts:

- Clearly articulate a vision of quality teaching and learning
- Expect all students to learn to high standards
- Develop common understanding of student work and performance that exemplify high standards



Acquiring & Allocating Resources (Fiscal, Human, Physical)

Reforming districts:

- Allocate funds flexibly to focus on student learning needs
- Build capacity to obtain additional resources for district goals/priorities
- Deploy professional expertise to meet goals of instructional improvement and equity



Developing the Profession

Reforming districts:

- Attend to professional learning needs at all levels of the system
- Make explicit connections between professional development and the local vision of teaching and learning
- Nurture a culture of continuous learning and collaborative professional community at all system levels



Responding to / Contending with Exogenous Policies

Reforming districts:

- Are strategic in their responses to externally imposed mandates
- Work to align state and federal policies with their own articulated vision of teaching and learning
- May re-fashion or even waive out of policies that are not consistent with local goals and initiatives



Creating Local Systems of Accountability

Reforming districts:

- Articulate clear expectations for schools, principals, teachers, and students
- Collect and use multiple sources of relevant data to assess progress
- Foster shared understanding of goals, and a culture of learning and improvement



Communicating

Reforming districts:

- Institutionalize channels for vertical and horizontal communication, within the system and with external stakeholders
- Attend to critical feedback from all levels of the system and from stakeholders
- Create opportunities for stakeholders to learn how district professional practices improve student learning



Partnering with Actors External to Formal District Organization

Reforming districts:

- Seek external partners that provide expertise, resources, and knowledge to further instructional improvement
- Partner with citizens, businesses, city agencies, local education foundations, community-based organizations, educational reform organizations, IHEs, and unions
- Pursue ongoing, meaningful work

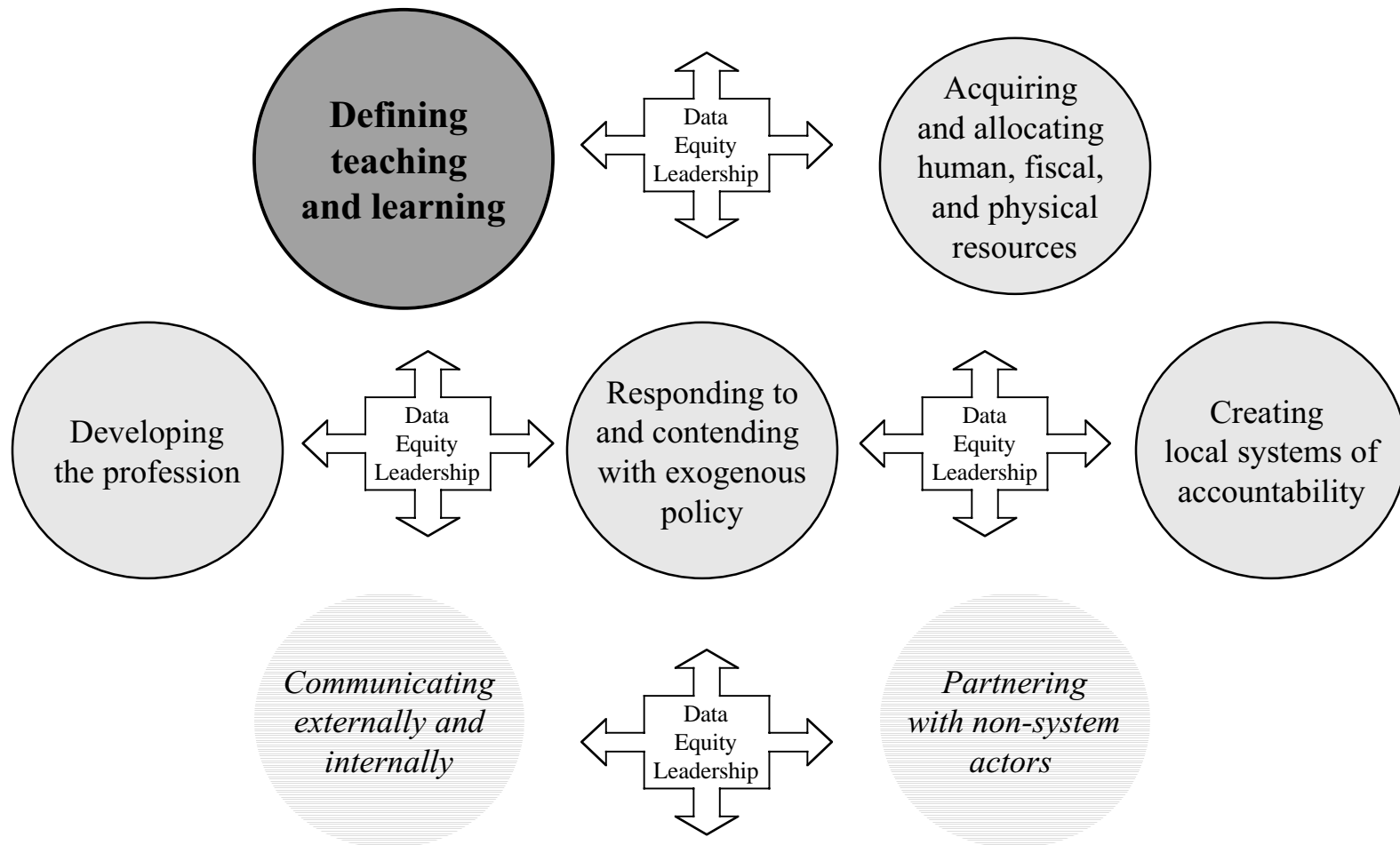


District Cases: Alternative Strategies for System-wide Instructional Improvement

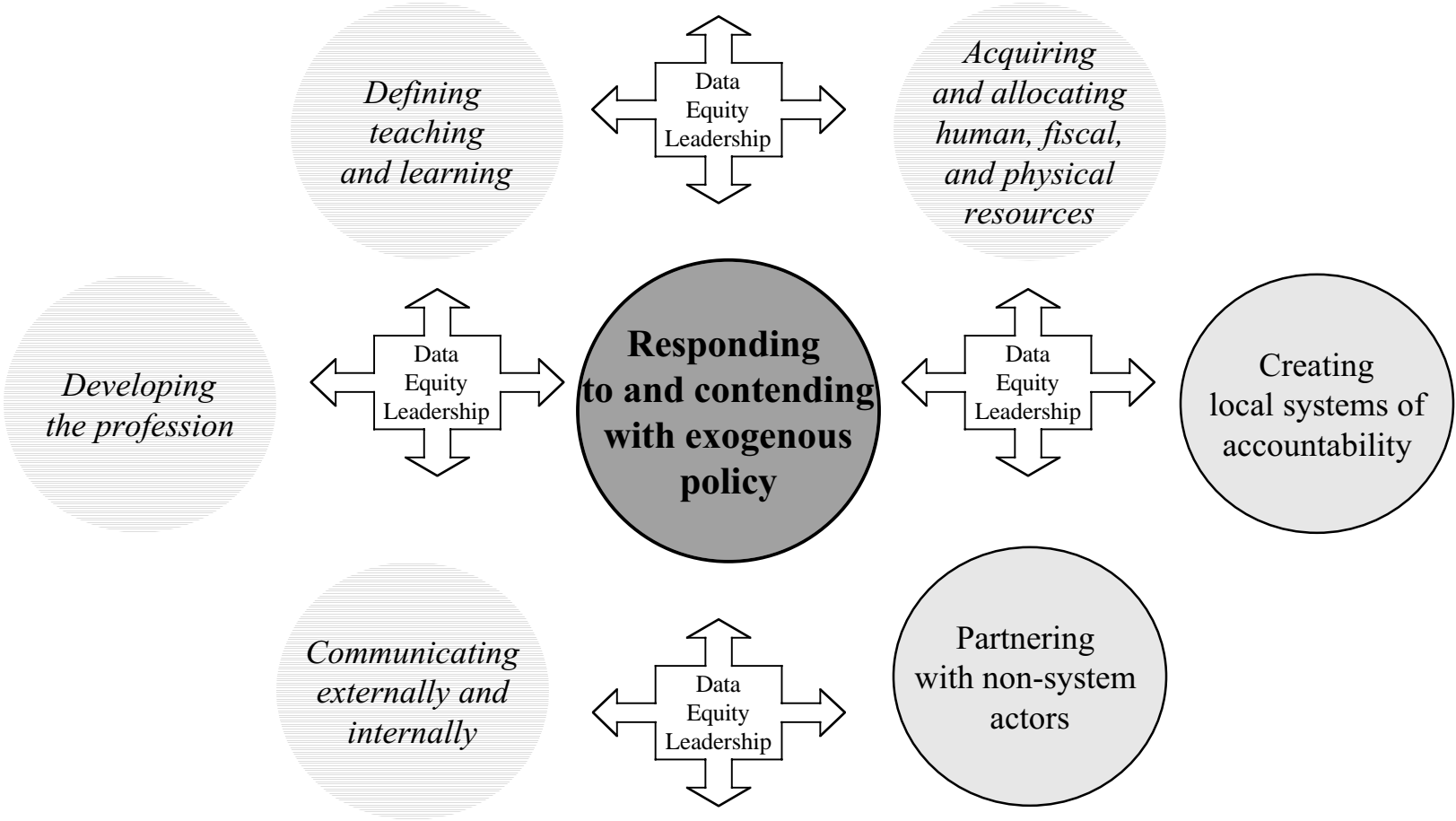
- San Diego: Theory of instruction drives district decisions and infrastructure
- “Pine River”: State policy system and local partnership focus local accountability and investments
- “Highland”: Broadened system boundaries and partnerships guide and align efforts in other functional domains



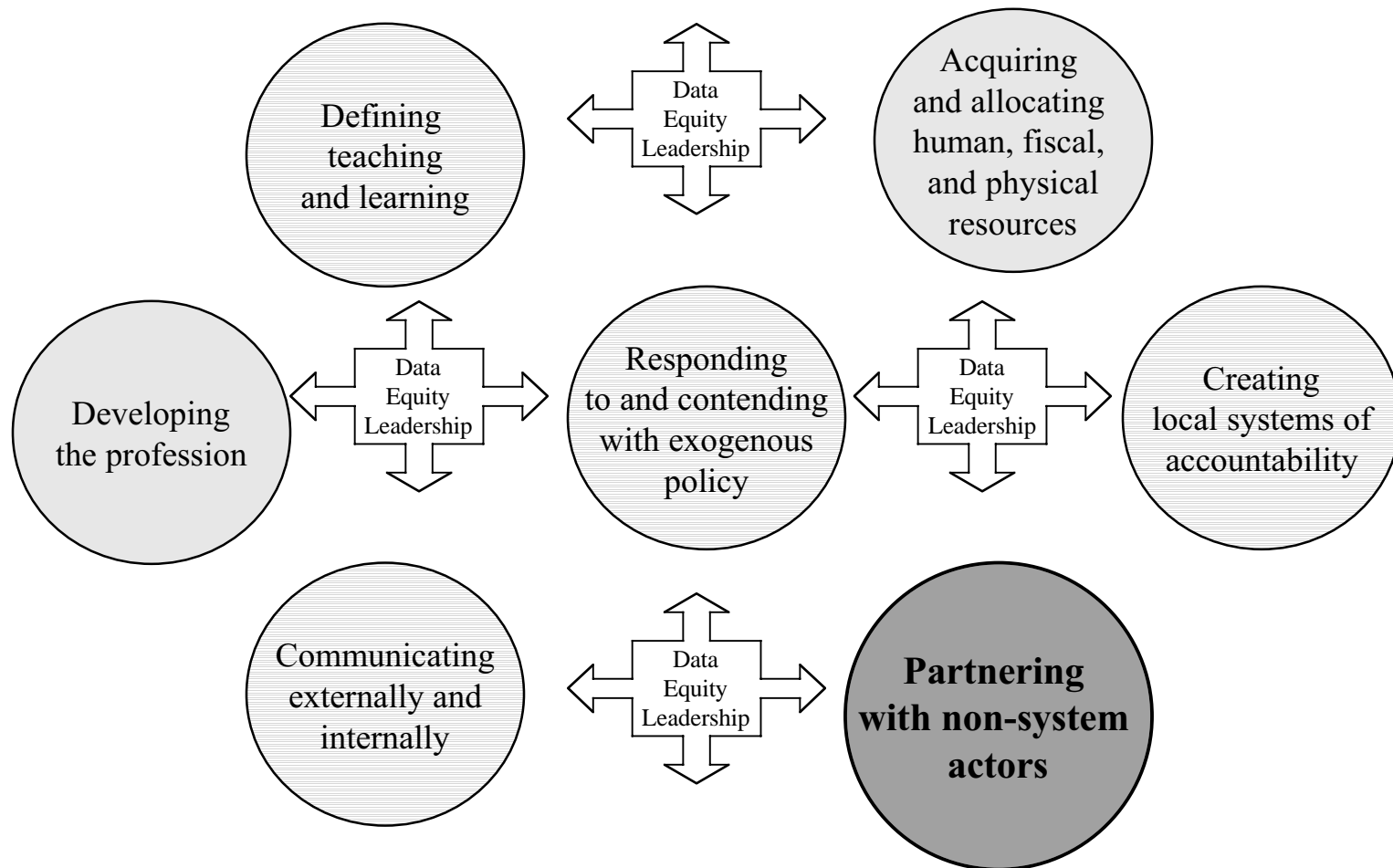
Primary Domains of San Diego's Strategy



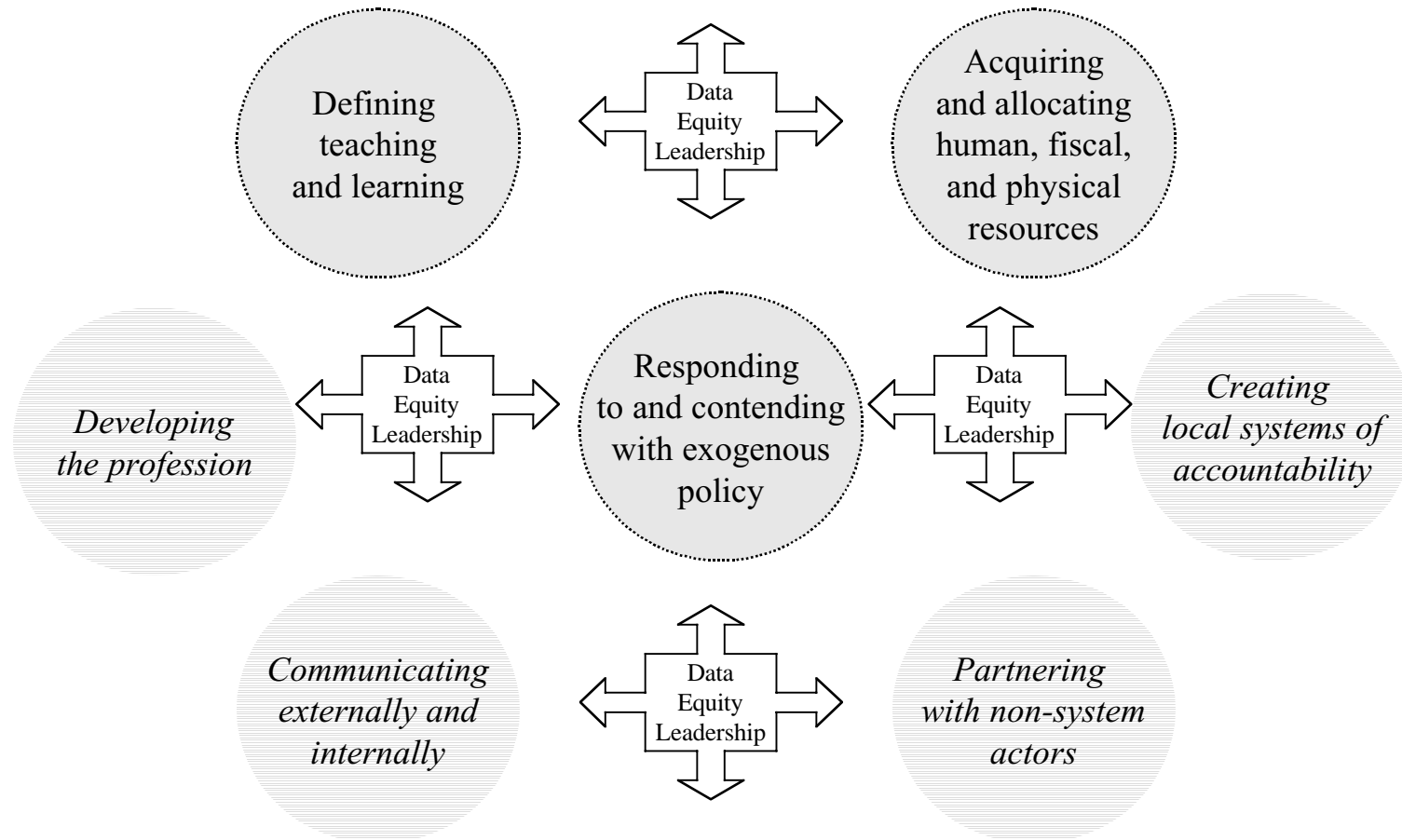
Primary Domains of Pine River's Strategy



Primary Domains of Highland's Strategy



Birchwood: Weak Use of Domains of Action

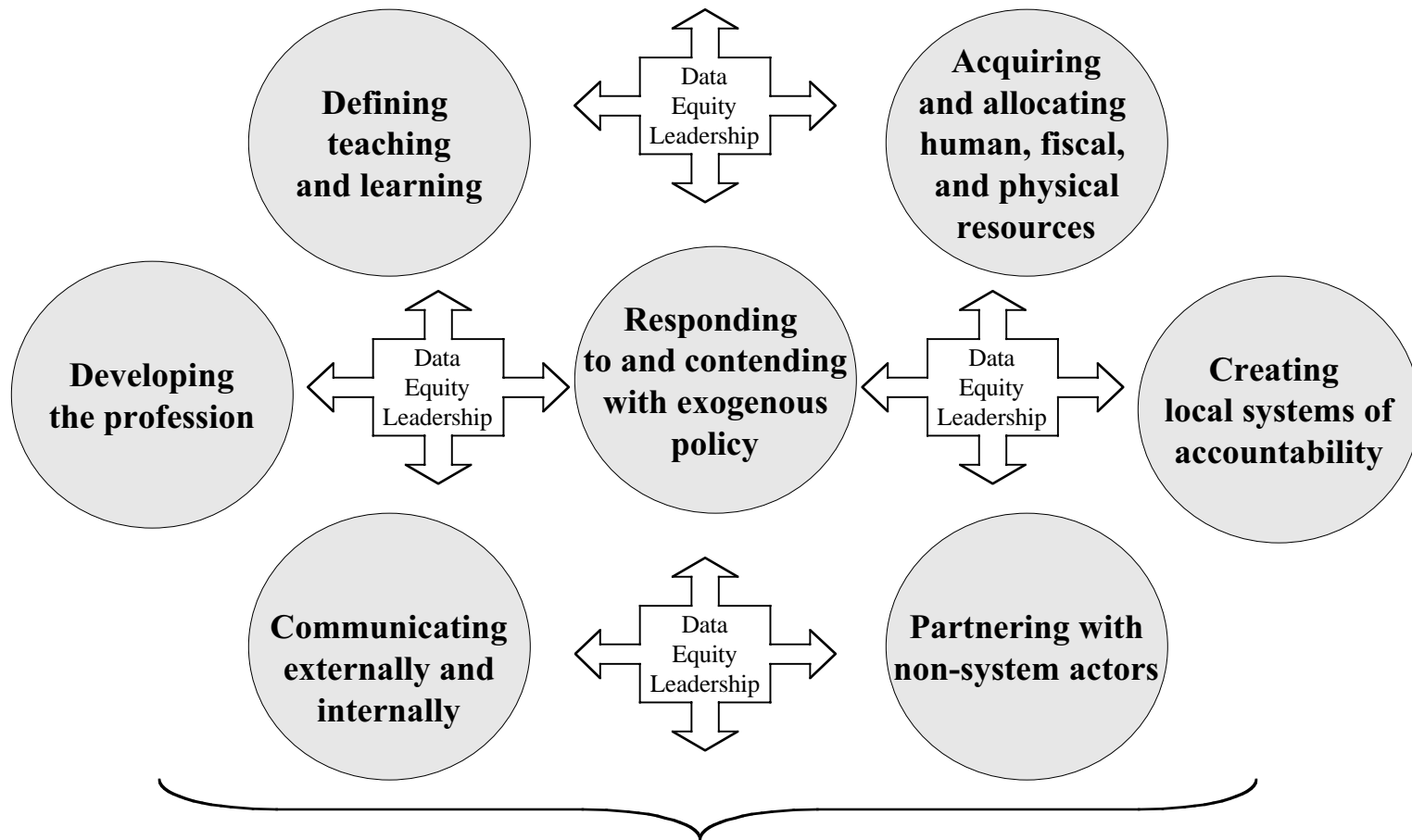


Cross-cutting Levers for District Reform: Leadership, Equity, and Data

- Leadership focuses all domains of district action on enhancing quality and equity of student outcomes
- Equity standards and data inform action in each domain
- Data in each domain signal capacity issues and build coherence in system reform



Domains of District Action



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