Learnings from COCo’s re-structuring years

Modeling the change you want to see

COCo moved towards a collaborative team-based structure and away from an individual-lead organization with a clear hierarchy of tasks and roles. During the time of new hires, there were no examples of teams working together in the organization. The transition team completed the hiring of 2 new staff members and quickly disbanded, leaving only the transition coordinator in place. The transition team was a board and staff collaboration created to facilitate the hiring process was a good example of a new, team-based work structure. Keeping it alive longer may have provided a much needed example and healthy work model for new staff to adopt and learn from.

Building trust

Building trust requires meaningful, positive experience together. The staff and board were faced with a number of difficult decisions which provoked many dissenting voices. At the time, there was a lack of clear structure or process to work through these challenges. Once a structure emerged, teams (or hubs) began to successfully complete tasks together and trust began to grow between individuals.

Finding resilient teammates

Finding ways to maximize the resilience, flexibility, creativity and patience in the team is especially important. Investing in new staff who have a track record of quick bounce back and good problem solving skills can provide a leg up to the organization during a challenging time.

Planning a good exit strategy

Staff time overlap for in-depth orientation and organized notes or systems can do a lot to help new staff understand the context for the transition. At COCo this stuff wasn't done particularly well, leaving new staff to train themselves on an old system while relying heavily on one remaining in-house staff member from the previous working model to help them understand the lay of the land.

One thing at a time

During the first year, COCo transitioned from an director-led organization, to a collaborative structure, challenged the pay scale and other fundamental policies and moved to a open-source computer system. In retrospect, this may have been too many core changes, which added to the uncertainty felt by staff and board during that time.

Organizational readiness

At COCo there was an opportunity to move towards something different because there were already so many changes happening at the organization, namely the departure of an executive director. The remaining team members had a spirit and philosophy of collaboration that helped move the change forward.

Co-creation

Where we've had the most success at COCo were during times of true co-creation. Thinking together, building as we walk together built buy-in and an organization-wide sense of ownership.