The Structure

At Conception (2000-2006)

Co-directors and later an executive director were at the core of managing the organization's stakeholders and staff.

Rubber stamp board, advisory committee (by invitation) created.

COCo worked within a smaller circle of ownership to control the development of the organization's early years. The goal wasn't yet to widen the circle of influence.

The following is our understanding of COCo's current organizational structure:

![Organizational Structure Diagram]

The idea (2006)

The organization would be organized via a hub structure, which emphasized group roles/accountability over individual roles/accountability (similar to the governance models of nonprofits- with a board of directors, an EC, and a board committee).

Each hub would be responsible for a different area of the organization (finances, programming, specific projects, facilitation, etc.), with a central hub that addresses issues that cannot be dealt with by one or more outer hubs.

The central hub would be made up of representatives from these hubs, but could be attended by any member at any time. All hubs, including the central hub would have a designated facilitator.

A big focus of the idea was on how we were working together, not just structure (ex. organizing around human energy; creating structures/processes that are flexible, experimental, and open; and focusing on on-going dialogue & open communication)
The Experiment (2006-2008)

The early hub structure developed in a piece meal way because of the energy that needed to go into managing the organizational transition (Keeping things running smoothly with a significantly reduced staff, bringing in/orienting new people, and letting some of the old processes/structures go).

In the early structure, we had many small working groups, with names attached to help us understand who was responsible for what. Nothing was formalized. We were making it up as we went along. Our philosophy was that a structure needed to grow out of our work together.

We came to a standstill. Communication broke down. We hired an outside facilitator to help us create a collective understanding of the challenges and opportunities we were experiencing and how to move forward.

A working group was created that led the staff and board through a series of work sessions to draw from examples and research to develop structural options that we could choose to move into. (See resources from Interpares in Ottawa and Silvia Rivera Law Project in NYC) This also required getting on the same page about where we were departing from and why.

We developed jobs through looking at what inspired us (where our energy was) and looking at the needs of the organization.

The board with two relationships to the organization: legal steward, indicated by the box and unidirectional arrow and collaborator, indicated by the large circle.

The smaller circles in each hub represent coordinators.
The Reality (2009-2010)

The hub structure was more fully developed, with clear mandates, members and accountability mechanisms developed for each hub. In addition to a collection of hubs, a central hub called a Coordinating Group (CoG) was created:

**Mandate**
- Making sure things don’t fall through the cracks by reviewing COCo functioning from a global perspective (financial, human, governance)
- Coordinate organization-wide planning and evaluation - especially related to programming, learning and reflecting.
- Think together to come up with recommendations for approval and discussion by the staff or board, especially issues relating to issues of finance, HR and governance.
- HR role focus still to be determined.
- Facilitate organization-wide changes
(Still need to clarify the relationship between COG and hubs, most urgently the HR Hub)

**Make-up**
The COG consists of participation from 3 central areas of COCo: 1 member from Finance Hub, one from HR Hub and one from Governance Hub. Other. Other staff are always welcome to participate in meetings in order to speak to specific agenda items. If a COG member can’t make a meeting, another staff member will step in (ideally someone from the representing Hub).
The Future...

How can we ensure that the structure continues to evolve, without consuming precious work time?

How can we create a strong governance model that works well with the collaborative staff structure we've created? (a model where board and staff relationships and member-involvement is collaborative, strong, and sustainable)

How can we challenge ourselves to move from autonomous work to being truly more collaborative? Mean in teams, with buddies or in some other configuration.

Time-line by theme...

Shared leadership and distribution of power

At Conception 2000-2006

Co-directors/director were at the heart of decision making. Advisory board helped guide direction of the organization. The board functioned as a rubber-stamp board.

The idea 2006

To be leader-full (not leaderless) - all members are actively involved in an on-going journey of self-designing and self-managing the organization’s systems and processes.

As much as possible, each hub works as a holograph of the entire organization. For example, instead of relying on a particular person to do grant writing, each hub would write its own grants.

Roles exist as they do in any other organization, but are defined more by the “people and the tasks they currently want and are able to do,” rather than simply as “positions that people are filling.” This doesn’t mean that people move around as only they see fit. It simply means that the invitation to engage as one sees fit is strongly felt by everyone and the nature of each person’s role is developed through conversation.

The Experiment (2006-2008)

The expressed intention to have leadership, guidance and direction come from multiple actors in the organization.

Created a task inventory in which we collapsed all of the organizations job descriptions into one document so that we could see the global picture of the organization's tasks and divide them up based on what made sense with the individuals present.

Wanted to organize ourselves so that decision making power was held by those who had the most information about the decision, (ex. People working on the legal project could make decisions about the the legal information work).

The Reality 2009-2010
More clarity about responsibilities and expectations (both at an individual and group level) = ownership over the work= invested team members = more leaders in more areas.

Job descriptions exist, but our approach to them is open and flexible- balancing the needs, interests and capacities of individuals with the needs of the organization as a whole.

Change takes time.

Focus on skill-sharing and peer-learning.

The Future...

How can we inspire leadership in un-paid team members at COCo (members, board members, volunteers)?

How can we value seniority and experience and still maintain a focus on sharing power?

Accountability

At Conception 2000-2006

Heirarchical structure meant that each person knew who they were accountable to. Trainers report to Training and admin coordinator, Training and admin coordinator report to ED, ED reports to Board.

The Idea 2006

Collaborative structure would build relationships and those relationships (commitment to dialogue and communication skills) help us to be accountable to one another.

The Experiment (2006-2008)

Confusion. Accountability is not clear. In the absence of a clear process, we leaned on old ways, and what was present: Old power dynamics, seniority, skills, and dialogue. “That's not the way we do things around here.”

A kind of black hole between old COCo and new COCo...

We tried to use new words to help us try new things. “Training” became “facilitation”, “committee” turned to “hubs”.

When things weren't clear, we talked about it. We talked a lot. The work continued to get done, but relationships suffered.

Accountability is built through trust. Trust develops through working with each other and creating space for dialogue. With a new crew (board and staff) and a lot of ambiguity and little time to talk through things in a structured way, trust was not built right away.

The Reality 2009-2010

More clarity about responsibilities and expectations = more clear accountability.

Increased investment in dialogue (ex. conflict and communication internal training and process development, learning and reflecting sessions, regular staff meetings) led to an increased capacity to
confront each other when don't meet expectations at the hub level. This habit also relies on a process or a 'last resort' entity to help. The CoG has been useful in this way.

Still working on organization-wide accountability.

Evaluations are frequent and intentional.

**The Future**

Can we continue to clarify role of the CoG? What happens when expectations aren't met repeatedly? Is this process clear and understandable to everyone?

**Governance**

**At Conception 2000-2006**

Rubber stamp board and advisory board.
Limited membership model meant only a few groups were voting members at AGMs.
Board of directors was staff driven.

**The Idea 2006**

All new board, wide open, but not from membership.
Not sure at this point what governance would look like. Invited new board members on who said that they would be interested in exploring this.
We knew that governance needed to be looked at, but didn't put energy into it. The focus was on staff.

**The Experiment (2006-2008)**

Recruited new board members.
Made small changes to bylaws (broadened membership slightly).
1st participatory Annual General Meeting in 2009.
Struggled with how to work collaboratively with the board, both to formalize the structure and to get things done in general.
The re-structuring process involved a good deal of board involvement, which was both an amazing and draining process.
Significant board turnover.

**The Reality 2009-2010**

2nd participatory Annual General Meeting
Moving towards a more engaged membership.
Moved from a board of 5, few from members, to a board of 7 almost entirely from our membership.
Still unclear how to work collaboratively with the board. Staff trying a number of strategies (board point people in human resources, finance and governance areas)
Slowly reducing board involvement in operations now that most of the re-structuring work is done.

The Future...
What is the role of the board at COCo?
How can we make board and membership participation meaningful and useful in advancing COCo's mission?
What is needed to support the board in meeting the expectations of the staff and needs of organization as a whole? (Orientation? More autonomy? Less autonomy?)

Dynamism and flexibility

At Conception 2000-2006
Responding to needs coming from the community sector and groups that we work with. COCo facilitated made to measure training that was adapted to the reality of groups and made to measure consultations, as needed to groups to increase capacity.
Project grants written and conceived sometimes 18 months before the work would be able to begin.
Heavy emphasis on office staff working with a rigid plan. (Tasks attached to a plan, living the plan every day)

The Idea 2006
Disequilibrium is actively sought out- i.e. the interjection of new information and relationships that challenge the organization, causing the system to constantly reevaluate itself.
This approach is not all or nothing. It should be viewed as a continuum. The fundamental driving energies for moving towards a more collaborative organization are: 1) Organizing around the human energy that currently exists, 2) Increasing transparency, 3) Reducing rigidity of current structures/processes to allow people to move freely into the organization and across role/organizational boundaries, 4) Engaging in on-going dialogue, 5) Continuously developing our communication skills, 6) Questioning our assumptions of how things should work, and 6) Being open to different degrees and types of involvement.

The Experiment (2006-2008)
Investment in internal dynamise. How can we be more flexible and engaging for people who work here?
Lots of research on how others were doing things. Took best ideas from examples of collectives, collaborative organizations big and small. Created multiple scenarios and options and picked one to try, knowing it would keep evolving and changing as we went.

The Reality 2009-2010
No more 'trainers'. Everyone is staff, on payroll, with benefits, flex-time, meeting time and other designated tasks that can change and evolve to best meet the needs of the organization, and ultimately,
the needs of the sector.
People rotate in and out of hubs in order to encourage learning and make the best use of their skills.
All employees are expected to have a broad variety of skills and to make a commitment to collaborate with others.
Explicit investment in ongoing learning, for example, we have learning and reflecting (internal training) meetings every 6 weeks.
Continue to write project grants, but mostly rely on more consistent funding (3 year projects vs. 1 year). We have more control over our programming, and can adapt in a more timely manner to needs we pick up on.
Many different people are invested in new ideas and new programming initiatives.

**The Future...**
Ideas are being tested with staff departures. Can we take advantage of the changes to 'rotate' and continue to build capacity at a staff level?
Work on the balance of long-term planning and timely programming initiatives.

**Physical space and use of technology**

**At Conception 2000-2006**
There was an ED's office, training coordinator worked in the middle office, admin and IT at the front of the space. There were 3-5 in-office, full-time staff.
Trainers come and go, make photocopies, attend meetings, but mostly work outside the office.
Bookkeeper comes in weekly.

**The Idea 2006**
4 in office staff, part-time, plus a bunch of facilitators who work mostly outside the office.
No in-house IT person. Bookkeeper still coming in weekly.
No more ED's office, all offices are shared.

**The Experiment (2006-2008)**
Plan to shift facilitators into in-office staff. Mat-leave coverage, more office staff, new communications coordinator.
Catch up time! Troubleshooting open source
Halfway new, half old, more stations, sharing work stations, bringing in new desks for more people
Computers were outdated. Move to open source technology and new computers! New IT help, on contract who works remotely, from outside the office.
The Reality 2009-2010

Everyone on payroll (except IT and bookkeeper). Staff of 10 (plus IT and bookkeeper). No one works more than 28 hours/wk. Space getting tight!

Common space and kitchen in the front, offices in the back. People working on their own computers. Revamped the website.

Skyping in for meetings, some folks working from home or outside the office sometimes, tracking office presence with google calendars.

In office systems for who answers the phone first.

Making use of googledocs as a way to share and modify documents and plans really easily.

Communications/IT hub continuing to evolve and focus on internal and external programming.

The Future...

How can we maximize the pros, and minimize the cons of so many part-time workers?

How can we make the best use of our physical space? (Make sure everyone's comfortable, has enough space)

Adapting to shifting needs around space as we move forward.