Workshop: Re.imagining our Organisation

KEY MESSAGE

Organisations must re-orient their structure and practice to reflect the skills and values they want to see in the world.

3h – 4.5h

minimum 8 participants

AIMS OF THE INTRODUCTORY MODULES

Explore enabling factors, which can help overcome perceived organisational barriers to systemic change.

SESSION SUMMARY

This session guides the group to think about the conditions in their organisations which may make change more or less easy to engender. It provides discussion of the types of structures and support which may be leveraged for organisational change. It includes an introductory group exercise (poll or sociometry) followed by small group and plenary discussions about organisations.

SESSION SUMMARY

1. Introduce topic of organisational change (5 mins)
   Note: the field of organisational change is vast and you may want to refer to some of the wider literature, or invite an organisational change expert, to support and expand your workshop

2. Poll on organisational change (20 – 40 mins)
   Ask for a show of hands for people who agree with some or all of the following questions. You can then discuss what the results show about the areas where the participants, and their organisations/networks, need to put effort into developing

   • Feel that they are ready (motivated, courageous, knowledgeable) to take a fundamentally new path towards reimagining activism.

   • Feel that their organisations promote the personal growth and development to work systemically.

   • Feel that their organisations’ management policies and practices are consistent with the values they strive to promote (such as equality, fairness, etc).

   • Think that enough people in their organisation have the leadership skills to work on systemic change.

   • Think they know some of the leverage points within their organisation for achieving fundamental improvements in the way they are organised and behave.

   • Optional: if desired, you can run a sociometric exercise with these and other questions (participants stand on left if they agree and right if they disagree, and are invited to explain their positioning).

   • Optional: if desired, you can include time for personal reflection and learning before moving onto the more theory-based sections on organisational change, eg. running a guided visualisation or playing a recorded audio version, or inviting participants to meditate, draw, or journal their reflections.
3. Explain ideas around organisational change (20 mins)
Reflect on results of poll – where we are at in knowing what steps to take within our own institutional structures, and our own lives, to take on this challenge.

Reassure group that this is an endeavour that cannot be undertaken alone but is about a massive shift in society as a whole, where civil society can play a leading role.

Explain/discuss key concepts around organisational change (Key Concepts). Note that many organisations have been already been through organisational change efforts; you may want to bring these up in the discussion to surface what has worked well and could be built on.

4. Organisational strategies (1.5 – 2.5h)
Now invite participants to take time to complete the Self-assessment worksheet of organisations. This is a chance for participants to think through the structural, relationship and management set-up of their organisations to consider how prepared they are to embark on change strategies for the Great Transition.

Following the completion of the worksheets, ask participants to form groups of 3-4 and share the results and main trends they have noticed in completing the worksheets.

In addition, ask them to discuss which features of their organisations will be the most effective pathways or levers to instigate and enable organisational change to allow for more systemic, long-term strategic approaches.

At the end of the group discussions, ask groups to synthesise the conclusions from their conversation into three main headlines:

- Aspects of organisational functioning which could most benefit from changing in order to tackle systemic change more effectively
- Barriers and constraints which may hinder their ability to take on organisational change
- Strengths and levers which will help their organisations tackle change

You may choose to leave the group discussions there, or you may wish to go into more detail about the type of strategies organisations could consider developing. If the latter, invite groups to prepare the following task:

Could you experiment with a low-resource project based on system change strategies to show the value of such efforts to the wider organisation or leadership base?

What could this look like?

Remember that the outcomes and indicators for such a project might look quite different from a ‘normal’ project or campaign.

5. Conclusion (45 – 60mins)
Final plenary de-brief: small groups share highlights of learnings with whole group and, if relevant, their project ideas for systemic change.

To support participants’ follow-up work, the facilitator may want to explore relevant insights from the Guide, such as the value of Communities of Practice, the importance of leadership skills, the role of networks and movement-building in decentralised decision-making.

You could also plan a follow-up workshop 4-8 weeks following this one. If so, you would want to have a more task-oriented approach to the group discussions and support participants to leave with a clear action plan to then review and feedback on at the follow-up workshop.
KEY CONCEPTS

Re.imagining our organisations (pp 66 – 77 guide)

To work successfully on system change, networks and organisations need a coherent vision to tackle our systemic crises. This vision serves as a shared framework for all co-workers and helps align organisational objectives and strategies. (p66/67)

Many organisations are still organised around specific issues and have developed an organisational culture of issue expertise. This means that much of the work happens in silos and the connections between issues remain unseen. To gain a more systemic perspective, it can be more appropriate for organisations to structure around systems and deeper leverage points (solutions). (p67)

Research shows that neither top-down decision-making structures nor organisations with a strong culture of consensus building are the best at dealing with systemic challenges. The most successful organisations are those with structures and decision-making processes that allow teams to make autonomous decisions. (p68)

Cross-functional teams, instead of departmental lines, can enable more holistic strategies where fundraising and communications become important voices that serve the team’s change strategy. (p69)

Ultimately the goal should be to create learning organisations based on free, horizontal exchange and flows of information, a commitment to learning and personal development, valuing people and their inborn creativity, a climate of openness and trust and learning from experience. (p69)

People management policies and practices as well as the way we treat our colleagues should be consistent with the values our organisation strives for (equality, fairness, less competition etc.). (p70), and avoid reproducing the structures of oppression that exist in the wider system. (p71)

Working effectively on systemic change also requires leaders to have leadership skills based on collaboration, facilitation and innovation. These skills include the ability to think in systems, building/nurturing networks and movement organising. (p72)