LEADERSHIP STRUCTURES

AND PRACTICES

One question that younger generations often ask is whether there are new models of how to run and lead organizations that do not concentrate authority and responsibility in one top person. These models exist, but they are often unrecognized or embedded within traditional-looking hierarchies.

Over the past several years, Building Movement Project has started to identify and document these models. Innovation is more likely in smaller organizations where experimental structures are often easier to put into operation because bureaucracy and culture can be less entrenched or easier to adapt when fewer people are involved. In larger organizations (i.e. more than 10 staff members), alternative models are more difficult to find, and in some cases are strongly linked to one leader rather than any lasting structural practice.

Most research on leadership structures has been focused on the for-profit sector, where corporations have been experimenting with new models in an attempt to increase their productivity and competitiveness in a global market. Recent nonprofit reports have pointed to the need to look at how leadership is practiced within the sector, as well.[1]

There are many ways to structure an organization, from models in which the top level of executive leadership is shared internally by two or more people (for example, a co-directorship) to models in which there is one person in the executive role, but decision-making is consistently and methodically pushed down to other levels in the organization (for example, strong program directors). Each model has similar elements and they are often combined in some way (for example, a project-based structure), but most importantly, they are adapted to the needs of each organization in order to increase impact and responsiveness.[2]

In many cases, when it is rigid and non-adaptive, the structure of leadership itself can limit the growth or participation of employees across all generations. Even in small organizations where growth seems restricted, altering the way that decision-making and responsibility are distributed can provide significant opportunities for leadership development. These changes can build a deep base of talent and skills within organizations.

Instead of replacing the existing hierarchy, the ultimate goal of these changes in decision-making and distribution of responsibilities is to increase the effectiveness of organizations in the long-run. There are many ways to introduce these changes, for instance:

- Implement shared models of decision making, including distributed leadership and intergenerational leadership teams.
- Distribute responsibility for decision-making beyond program design and implementation. While it is a good place to learn, include a path towards participating in decisions that affect the direction or growth of the organization.
- Encourage the development of outside partnerships and relationships— sharing power and accountability includes external visibility.

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1   For example, see "Doing More with More: Putting Shared Leadership into Practice" by Michael Allison, MBA, Susan Misra, MPA, and Elissa Perry, reprinted in the Nonprofit Quarterly, Summer 2011 (http://www.tccgrp.com/pdfs/180206_Reprint.pdf); and Forces for Good: The Six Practices of High-Impact Nonprofits, by Leslie Crutchfield and Heather McLeod Grant. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2007) (http://www.forcesforgood.net)

2   See Structuring Leadership: Alternative Models for Distributing Power and Decision-Making in Nonprofit Organizations (Building Movement Project, 2011)

LEADERSHIP TOOLS

While younger generations are seeking new models of how to lead that do not concentrate authority and responsibility in one top person, older generations want to adjust their leadership roles to look beyond their comfort zone of how organizations have operated to date. The report in this section provides background and ideas on the types of practices that push decision-making down and build leadership at all levels.

The next section of *Leadership Tools* will address leadership transitions and what every generation can do to prepare for them as a consistent part of leadership practice.