

INFILTRATION: HOW THE VALUES OF OPPRESSIVE SYSTEMS TEND TO ARISE IN CO-OPS (AND WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT IT)

RED FLAGS AND INDICATORS

Racism and white supremacy : race, culture, ethnicity

- the assumption of white as the norm
- talk about needing to “pull” people of color in to “diversify” the co-op, rather than needing to change the co-op culture, build cultural competence so that people of color will want to work at the co-op
- leadership or public face of the co-op is disproportionately white
- higher turnover of people of color

Patriarchy and male supremacy: gender, sex, transphobia

- policies and bylaws that use gender binary language (he/she) rather than gender neutral pronouns (they/them)
- office space has gender segregated bathrooms
- leadership or public face of the co-op is disproportionately male
- masculine voices dominate at meetings
- masculine opinions are held in higher esteem
- cis men feel more entitled to propose changes to policies or practices in order to get their needs met
- higher turnover of women and trans people
- women and trans people do the majority of the unrecognized and undervalued work: taking notes, cleaning, answering the phones, taking care of co-workers, recognizing and appreciating people's work
- masculine people restating words, statements, ideas of women, trans, and gender non-conforming people in meetings, or not listening to what women, trans, and gender non-conforming people are saying

Capitalism: class, income, wealth

- meetings are unpaid
- childcare not provided for unpaid meetings
- meetings held outside of work hours (in evenings or on weekends)
- low paying jobs, with the assumption that people will be able to coast off their partner's jobs
- not providing health benefits, retirement plans
- expectation to work more than 40 hours/week, or long hours to “get the job done”
- assumption that people starting the job have savings with which to pay member buy-in

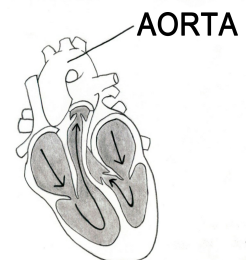
Ableism: mental, physical, and emotional ability

- only full time workers get health benefits
- no options for part time work
- if you can't work, you don't get paid
- if you can't work fast or “hard” enough, you aren't hired, or should quit/leave
- not providing health benefits, retirement plans
- expectation to work more than 40 hours/week, or long hours to “get the job done”
- using the word “crazy” in ways that equate it with wrong, bad, or broken

Homophobia and heteronormativity

- assumption of straight as the norm
- lack of recognition of queer people

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- offhanded comments, jokes that equate gay with bad, weak, lesser, gross
- questions: why don't you have a boyfriend?
- statements: you'd look so good in a dress
- low paying jobs, with the assumption that people will be able to coast off their partner's jobs
- higher turnover of queer people

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Who are the faces of the leaders of the organization? How did they get there?
- Who do people go to to get questions answered?
- Who are the 'experts'?
- Who holds the power in the organization? Whose opinions and voices matter most?
- What are the assumptions of needs of folks in the space?
- What is the division of labor in the organization?
- What types of knowledge and skills are valued? Which are not valued?
- Are there types of work that are unpaid? What types are they?
- What language is used around sexuality?
- How is gender identity talked about and addressed?
- Are there people who speak english as a second language in the co-op? If so, what structures, if any, exist for language development, interpretation and translation, to ensure their full and knowledgeable participation?

TACTICS FOR INTERRUPTING AND CHANGE-MAKING

Exit surveys

High turnover is usually a red flag that there's something going on within the organization that's leading people to feel unsatisfied, uncomfortable, or unwilling to stay with the organization. This can be structural, interpersonal, or both. When this turnover is greater in some groups of people (women, people of color) than others, that's an even more sure sign that there's something the co-op needs to be addressing. Be sure to capture *why* people are leaving the co-op. Collect exit surveys from all members that leave the organization, to help capture the factors contributing to people's decisions to leave. You can even contact folks who have been gone from the organization for a while to see if they'd be willing to offer input retroactively.

People are often more willing/able to be honest about their decisions and the factors contributing to them *after* they've left the organization, when they have less concerns about how their honesty will impact their job stability, pay, or social relationships. So, it can be helpful to ask people for this information after they've left.

Ongoing individual and organizational education

Offer educational opportunities for the whole group, to catalyst discussion, build trust, and facilitate ongoing conversations with the membership. Also, be sure to remember that the work is not the workshop-- a good workshop will leave your co-op with a better understanding of the work you need to be doing as an organization to better address systemic power dynamics within the co-op. It should leave you with a long list of work to do!

Clearly define roles and expectations.

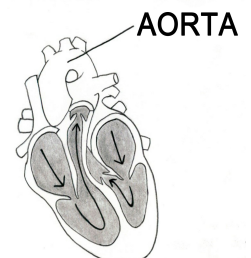
Ensure all jobs (esp ones that often get overlooked and then pushed to women, such as note taking, cleaning, phone answering, etc) are included and accounted for and assigned. They can be assigned to one job role, or they can intentionally be rotated between all workers or groups of workers.

Develop policies for addressing conflict, tension, and hurtful behavior.

You don't want to be doing this during a flare-up, when any policies or practices you adopt can feel very personal to whoever is involved in the current conflict. As a group, decide *how* you want to address these moments,

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when/where you want to address them (in meetings, through a specific committee, one on one), and by *whom* you want them to be addressed. Note that conflict, tension, and hurtful behavior are slightly different and you may want to choose to address them differently.

Identify, encourage, and intentionally develop leadership, especially among people from marginalized groups
Being surrounded by the values of white supremacy, patriarchy, capitalism, and ableism, it's very easy to internalize these values, even when they are hurtful to you. For this reason, people of color, women, trans and gender non-conforming people, poor people, disabled people may not recognize their own leadership skills, or strengths, even though they may seem very apparent to you. When building leadership, don't just leave people to self-identify and step up into roles by their own volition. When you do, you will be more likely to get folks who feel comfortable in leadership or entitled to leadership positions. Take a moment as an organization to identify where, and kinds of leadership, you see in the organization.

Also, intentionally build and develop leadership in your organization. Ways to do this:

- Mentorship: working in teams or pairs, buddies, experienced leaders exercise restraint and train others, make space for potential leaders to ask the group or individuals for assistance and feedback
- Skill Building
 - have a budget for professional development
 - cross training
 - pairing
 - rotation of tasks
 - mentorship
 - breaking down skills rather than just doing them
- Cooperative Education
 - Make sure everyone one know how the co-op is structured, and how to bring up proposals and change things
 - Robust orientation: to organizational structure
 - Develop manuals, written materials to refer to
 - Power: democratic decision making is not about getting your way, it's about thinking together and coming up with the best decision for the group. It's about compromise.
 - We're living in capitalism. People come in and they don't know how to participate within a democracy. Ongoing cooperative education, and economic study can help the whole group function better.

