design *for* relational economies

un:edge

Structure & Purpose

The structure is adapted from the Web of Life game, which explores interconnections and the ripple effects within a system. It requires cards and the worksheet. Remember, this is an exploratory activity. You should concentrate on making connections between concepts and discovering what excites your fellow participants.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Pick one person to be a guide and one to be a scribe. The guide will facilitate the activity and answer any questions. The scribe will make notes on the worksheet about various connections.
2. Sit in a circle so that all team members can face one another.
3. Lay out the cards, either shuffled together *(random draw)* or in their separate colour groups *(choice of card)*.
4. Everyone draws a card and puts it face down in front of them.
5. Choose someone to start. They read their card, so everyone knows what their tactical tool is.
6. Once they read it, they discuss how they think it relates to the organisation. Everyone else can join in as well.
7. Then the first participant chooses the next participant to their right or left. Participant 2 turns their card around and discusses their card's relationship to the organisation.

8. Finally, participants 1 and 2 discuss how their cards might be connected to help enact the tactic(s) they belong to. Anyone in the group can help if they get stuck.
    - *To support you can ask questions. For example, how do these relate to practices we already enact and how can we create a new practice out of them? Each card also has questions to help guide you.*
9. Once the discussion has finished, the scribe writes down what each of the cards are and the connection created between them.
10. This continues, with the last participant choosing the next, and both making connections between their cards, until everyone has made a connection.
11. If a connection is not made, the card is lost, and we move on to the next person. The player who lost the card will have a chance to pick another card and make a connection after everyone has had a turn.
12. By the end, the activity worksheet is full of complex connections between tactics. Participants can discuss which of these connections will be helpful to their organisation.

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1

Get paid for the work you do,
but make sure you redistribute
where you can.

Most of us engage in both paid and unpaid labour. The key is to make sure you get paid for the labour you do or, rather, to get value from your labour. Yet redistribution is also key, and we must also hold ourselves accountable for hoarding wealth.

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1. What challenges are there to discussing or tackling areas where your labour might be undervalued? How might this be taken forward?

Q

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2

Use 'big' clients to help fund smaller projects.

Many organisations do this instinctively. The central idea is that those clients who bring more revenue into your organisation will pay enough that you can also fund smaller projects that may not bring in a lot (or any) money. You are essentially making one wealthy client redistribute their funds to help a smaller (and often more disruptive) projects.

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1. Is this practice something you could or would want to make explicit and to whom (internally or externally)?

Q

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3

Think through commoning as a set of resistant and resilient practices, rather than a structure.

Structurally you may be a cooperative, land trust, or any other entity. However, the commons is a way of doing underpinned by a set of shared values and/or responsibilities. While not everyone within a commons will share the exact ethical, political, or philosophical stance, there is agreement on the value of commoning and sustainable practices.

siphon private funds

1. What is the "good trouble" (see John Lewis link on module sheet) that supports your organisation?
2. What tactical practices might you employ to further support the organisation?

Q

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4

Take into account what you are paying for that isn't necessary.

We want to be careful not to put personal onus on structural problems, but rather suggest that we have all been convinced by institutions that there are certain 'things' you need like paperwork, titles, certificates, and so on. It's worth thinking through what is really significant for your operations.

siphon private funds

1. Is there a different model you can operate under that requires less fees, less bureaucratic work, but also gives you the functionality you need?
2. Within your existing model, are there fees that you're paying to be included by name but from which you haven't gotten much in return?
3. Think through how you are part of the global supply chain: are there places we can cut back on needs and services or relegate them to a more local sphere (see non-monetary exchange)?

Q

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5

Consider the pitfalls of private philanthropy and how to help organisations die.

This isn't meant to support private wealth accumulation or its (often nefarious) origins. While there is increasing interest in philanthropy as an alternative to government grants, siphoning this money is also not a replacement for mutual aid, new economic models, or other practices that seek to replace old institutions.

siphon private funds

1. Does siphoning funds in this way bring up any ethical questions for your team, and how could these questions be weighed?

Q

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private funds

6

Invest beyond banks.

Alternatives for managing funds, lending, or other business support are out there, even if it does take a bit of time to figure out who aligns with your values and actions. Some practical options include a CDFI (Community Development Finance Institution), cooperative bank, credit unions, or for more general guidance, co-op specific business support.

siphon private funds

1. Where and how do you currently deal with finances? Why did you choose these (ease, accessibility, visibility, reach, etc.) and are there more significant factors that you could consider?

Q

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private funds

7

Use the market as it is to make interest on existing money (and question the inherent 'right' to do this).

As one of the experts we consulted suggested, it's difficult to shake the notion that if you have money, you have an inherent right to make more money off it. At the same time, there may be ways to exploit this very ingrained ideology. Think about how long-term income that is dependent on the system as it is can be redistributed, short-term, or just generally 'bite the hand that feeds it'.

siphon private funds

1. Are you currently investing and if so, to what end? Is investment a part of sustainability or counter to it (or both)?
2. How does the notion of investment determine or influence ideas of value?

Q

wean off

grant dependency and create collective pots

1

Self-tax and create collective pots of money.

Creating shared pots of money can be either a one-off event or a consistent practice, in which case it becomes a sort of self-tax. You may want to source through crowdfunding, community shares, or recurring payments to a democratically managed community fund. While there are many options for creating joint funds, the value systems that uphold them and the roles of those who contribute are key to picking something sustainable.

Wean off grant dependency

1. How might collective pots and self-taxing complicate notions of ownership, stewardship, identity and care? What processes of decision making would you instil alongside these tools?

Q

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Work as a cooperative,
not a charity.

There are many benefits to working as a charity, including certain tax breaks, but to truly create cohesion, reliability and mutual care requires a rejection of the paternalism and hierarchies inherent to charity work. While cooperatives are not the only responses to charities, the notion of democratic member control, solidarity and autonomy are key values that can be enacted across organisations working on equitable practices.

Wean off grant dependency

1.   If you are currently operating as a charity, what resources and support would you need to set in place to transition to a different structure?

Q

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grant dependency and create collective pots

3

Think through your value system, including and beyond monetary value.

Consider what we might mean by 'value' beyond money. What kinds of value do you see within the everyday work of your team or community? How might you keep track of this or otherwise show gratitude for it?

Wean off grant dependency

1. What kinds of value do you see within the everyday work of your team/community?
2. How can you keep track of other forms of value and their impact?

Q

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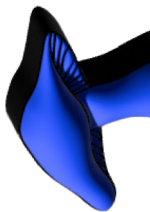## grant dependency and create collective pots

4

Create a federation of funders who would build a shared pot.

Funders compete to get the 'best projects', so how we move away from this competition? One idea is to have funders pool their financial resources together and create a very large, shared pot of money that could be used collectively. Funders would work together to find great projects, more resources could go into those projects, and each funder could share the benefits of the project's impact.

Wean off grant dependency

1. How could you frame the benefits of a 'funder federation' to interested parties?

2. What sort of decision-making practices would need to be in place for this kind of federation?

Q

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grant dependency and create collective pots

5

Consider the merits of creating a DAO.

A DAO, or Decentralised Autonomous Organisation, is a decentralised and member owned organisation that employs smart contracts on a blockchain network. While there are conversations to be had about co-opting, technocrats, and how these technologies are subject to the same techno-optimism as those that have gone before them, there is space for those who want to work against existing institutions. Still, it's important to not ignore the real, material impacts and complicated relationship to ownership and accountability.

wean off grant dependency

1. What might a DAO allow you to achieve that you wouldn't otherwise?
2. What are the merits & challenges?
3. How might you build feminist strategies into a DAO conception to redress techno-optimistic approaches?

Q

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wean off

grant dependency and create collective pots

6

Be a grant giver instead of seeking out grants.

You don't have to start with a huge sum of money. Even having a small grant available builds your reputation as an organisation, and giving to disruptive projects and people might even bring more money in from those who appreciate the work you're doing. More importantly, you get to decide the terms of engagement and think radically about what grants should look like.

Wean off grant dependency

1. How might you redefine the terms of engagement of grant-giving?
2. What are the limitations to change you've experienced through existing grant-making practices?

Q

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wean off

grant dependency and create collective pots

7

Create a non-monetary system of exchange.

Another longstanding and well-trialled practice that has many benefits is creating a system of exchange not based on money. Though there are several ways to structure it, the idea itself is a fundamental part of human interaction. Though some of the more resilient initiatives in this space have petered out, it does not need a formal entity to enact.

Wean off grant dependency

1. What might be learned to build upon, from the successes and demise of non-monetary initiatives?

Q

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make
disruption fun

1

Focus on building and/or bettering civil society groups.

Thinking through the principles of commoning infrastructures, complicating the notions of citizenship and relationality, and simply spending time with people (and more-than-humans) in groups of shared interest can be fun. Not all socio-political engagement needs to feel high stakes. Give yourself some time to imagine how common resources and abandonment of existing forms of ownership could add joy to you and those around you.

make disruption fun

1. How do your individual and organisational responsibilities to civic life influence your impact?

Q

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edge

make
disruption fun

2

Consider a 'no-shit work' model.

A "no-shit work model" (i.e. you don't have to do something you don't want to) has been proposed by the Post-Growth institute to ensure peoples' creativity and strengths are valued. Of course, the obvious question is what about the jobs no one wants to do? This evolves into a discussion on whether that job is really necessary, but there are also wider questions about the social division of labour and how 'shit work' more broadly is distributed in (gendered and racialised ways) in the economy.

make disruption fun

1. How might a 'no-shit-work' model make sense in your organisation?
2. Is there a way to implement this model without ignoring the realities of gendered/classed/racialised divisions of labour?

Q

un edge

make

disruption fun

3

Encourage imagination and play.

Encourage imagination and play within your community. Sometimes this is as easy as giving people a tactile activity to do during meetings or dedicating an hour to eat food and chat. Ask the big questions. What kind of world do you want to see? Provide alternative narratives.

make disruption fun

1. What kind of world would you like to see?
2. How can we be more social?

Q

un edge

make
disruption fun

4

Acknowledge and value the 'invisible' work.

Ideally, no one's efforts, whether they're volunteer hours or the everyday maintenance of shared space, would go unnoticed. Still, making a point to acknowledge the value of someone's time and effort goes a long way. It can reinforce responsibility and relationality, which is foundational to any organisation or community.

make disruption fun

1. What are your current practices of acknowledgement? How might they be revised or extended? Are they appreciated?

Q

un edge

make
disruption fun

5

'Formalise' fun.

Include joy as resistance into your principles, manifesto, or other central documents. Joy is disruptive in exploitative systems. When you centre it in everything you do, along with more 'serious' aims, you give it gravity and help to prevent certain pressures that lead to burnout.

make disruption fun

1. What are the joyful aspects of your work?
2. How might you lower 'expert' barriers to participation in some work domains?

Q

un edge

make
disruption fun

6

Be serious about wellbeing.

If you understand the significance of supporting wellbeing but still find high levels of burnout there might be a disconnect in the way that you want to operate and the way that you do. Of course, sometimes this is due to bigger structural norms. Still, embedding a concept of commons health and wellbeing into your everyday work and your team is a great way to show that wellbeing is more than just a buzzword.

make disruption fun

1. How is wellbeing embedded in your work practices and structures?
2. Are there safe spaces for listening? If not, how might you create some?

Q

make

disruption fun

7

Invest in time together.

Invest in time together to develop interests which might not seem directly related to the work you're doing, give people something to do with their hands, and feed each other. Building trust is essential in any community of people and trust can't be built if you don't spend time with one another. Finding time to just chat, without expectation, can be one of the hardest things to do but it's also one of the most important.

make disruption fun

1. How might you foster time and space for trust-building?

Q

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