

things you
should know
about feminist
co-leadership



FEMINIST CO-LEADERSHIP
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1

Co-Leadership offers a structural model to enable shared responsibility and decision-making between two or more people.

Co-leadership is simply a structure and a mechanism to lead, but the intention behind the way the model is practised is critical for it to contribute to transformation.



2

Feminist co-leaders in particular are committed to transform themselves and use their power, resources and skills, in non-oppressive, inclusive practices and processes.

Feminist funders and organisations in particular often practice co-leadership as part of their commitment to centring and sharing power and decisions in their organisations.

3

Co-leadership can support an organisation to be dynamic, robust, sustainable and flexible.

More than one voice, decision-maker and leadership style at the executive level can be of deep value to both the organisation and individuals in co-leadership.



4

Co-leadership is not a panacea to address unsustainable and/or hierarchical leadership, and does not provide an inevitable pathway to healthy organisations with well distributed power.¹

For this structure to contribute to more aligned values and practice, it is important to articulate clarity in shared vision and how the model contributes to the broader political project about sharing power and leading in a more collective way.²

*1. This idea and language of not seeing co-leadership as a panacea comes from our conversation with Susanna George.
2. This idea and language of connecting co-leadership to the broader political project of transformation first comes from our conversation with Lydia Alpizar.*

5

Co-leadership can lead to further decentralisation and collectivisation of leadership beyond the executive function, within and across organisations.

Feminist funders and organisations in particular often practice co-leadership as part of their commitment to centring and sharing power and decisions in their organisations.



6

If the intention of shared leadership is not actively named and practised across the organisation, co-leadership can even work to reinforce power dynamics, consolidate power or make leadership less accessible to their staff and senior leadership teams.

Self reflection, understanding of power, and clear mechanisms to communicate with and be accountable to the broader team are critical to address this.

7

Many organisations turn to co-leadership as a response to persistent hardship in their context, burn out, unsustainable workload and pace of the work.

During the pandemic and in the context of increased backlash and attack on rights, we are seeing this increase. For some, distributed leadership has been essential to sustain the individual leaders and the organisation and build resilience.



8

Many co-leaders have made efforts to prioritise practices of ritual, collective care and joy in their work.

In doing so, they are able to cultivate deeper relationships and meaningful moments at work that create a more resilient support system for the leaders. This does not make them immune from burn out.

9

Co-leadership may not work for everyone all the time - for some organisations it may only be impactful at certain moments in their life cycle.

During periods of rapid change, including during start up, co-leadership may help spur energy and pace. However, co-leadership during a time of 'consolidation' can be complex and even de-stabilising if the organisational culture is not ready or there is a clear political rationale or support mechanisms are not in place.

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