



**People
Working
Well**

It's Not You: The Impact of Nonprofit Systems on Leader Well-Being

With Alison Brewin

Territorial acknowledgement

I live and work on the unceded, ancestral territories of the Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group, the scəwaθenaʔt̓ təməxʷ (Tsawwassen), the Te'mexw Treaty Association, the Stz'uminus, the MÁLEXEŁ (Malahat), and the Quw'utsun peoples—nations whose relationship to these islands reaches back through countless generations. This place is also known within the broader territories of the SEMYOME (Semiahmoo), the Á,LENENEŁ ŁTE (W̱SÁNEĆ), and the water-connected homelands of the Cayuse, Umatilla, and Walla Walla peoples.

I've chosen to protect this tiny corner of those living territories and the island of S'Dayes a conservation covenant on my land through the Pender Island Conservancy, ensuring it remains a refuge for the soil, the trees, the tides, the four-leggeds, the non-leggeds (the endangered Shapr=tailed snake), and the wingeds—long into the future.



Who am I?

- ▶ Law degree but never practiced.
- ▶ Career in the sector, mostly women-serving/gender-equity organizations.
- ▶ Executive Director (ED) and similar roles - Eastside Family Place, Migrant Workers Centre, West Coast LEAF, Vantage Point.
- ▶ Interim ED - Seniors First, Access Pro Bono, BC Civil Liberties, VAST, WISH, Surrey Women's Centre.
- ▶ Consultant, advising EDs, boards and the sector.
- ▶ Writer, parent, queer, history-nerd, with a taste for bad queer romance novels



It's Not You!

1. The Non-Profit Sector and Leadership
2. The Context of Non-Profit Leadership
3. The Tools for Sustaining Non-Profit Leadership
4. Resources and Tips

The Non-profit Sector and Leadership

- ▶ 3 sectors: Public, Private and Non-Profit
- ▶ Other titles: 'Voluntary' 'NGO' 'Charitable' 'Social' 'Plural' etc
- ▶ Common denominators
 - legally defined by purpose, profits (surplus) not taxable

INTRODUCTION TO BRITISH COLUMBIA'S NONPROFIT SECTOR

In addition to providing a wide range of services to British Columbians, nonprofits and charities are a major economic force. Below we present key statistics highlighting their role as economic drivers, employers, and catalysts for civic engagement.



GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCTⁱ

\$36.4 billion



ANNUAL REVENUEⁱⁱ

\$65.5 billion



PERSONAL DONATIONSⁱⁱⁱ

\$2.9 billion

PERCENTAGE OF GDP
FROM NONPROFIT SECTORⁱⁱⁱ

9.1%



EMPLOYMENT^{iv}

397 thousand



AVERAGE SALARY^v

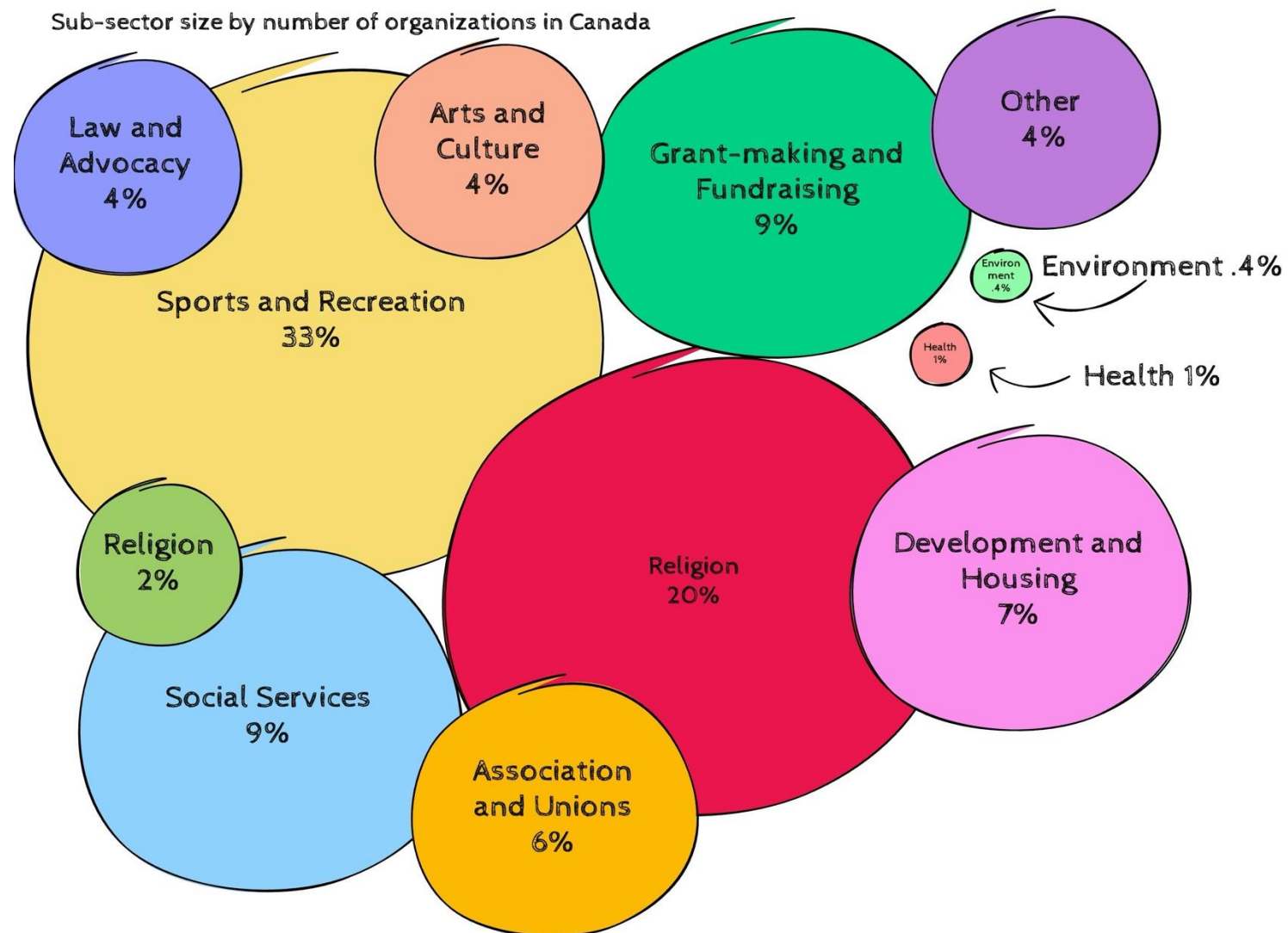
\$53,012



VOLUNTEER HOURS^{vi}

197.0 million

Sub-sector size by number of organizations in Canada



Taken from Stats Canada National Insights Into Non-profit Organizations, 2023
Prepared by Alison Brewin Consulting



Burnout and Non-Profit Leadership (from Jocelyn Helland)

Over 58% of non-profit workers in Canada report high levels of burnout.



71% of non-profit leaders say their workload is “unmanageable”.



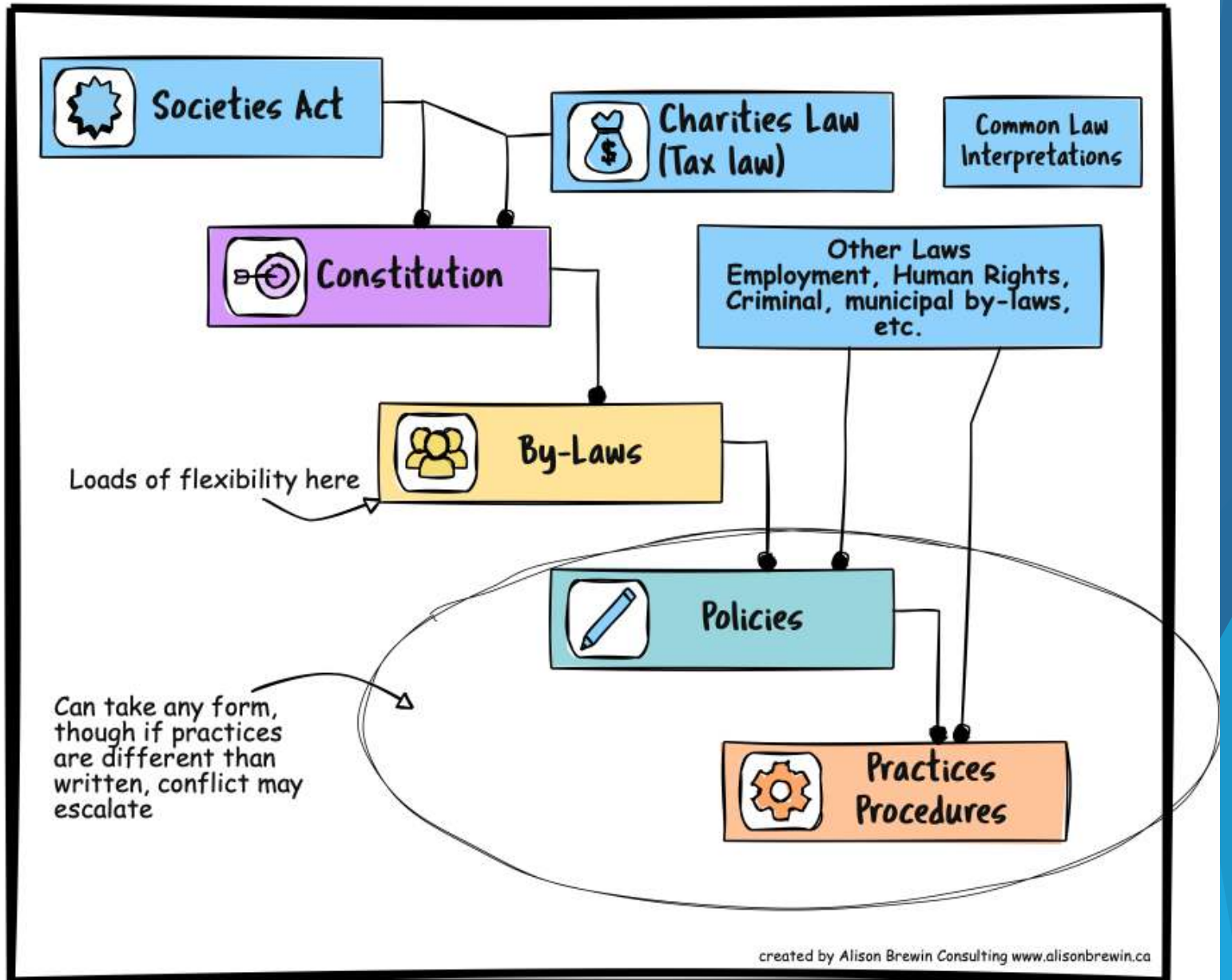
One in three EDs/CEOs is actively planning to leave their role within 12-18 months



Two-thirds of organizations report higher community need without matching funding, creating “structural moral distress” for staff.

Legal Structure

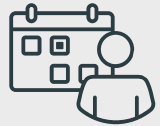
- Volunteer Board of Directors
- Constitutional Purpose
- Membership/Shareholder concepts
- Legal compliance
- Income Tax status
- Non-Profit as Employer



The background features abstract, overlapping geometric shapes in various shades of blue, ranging from light sky blue to deep navy blue. These shapes are primarily located on the left and right sides of the frame, creating a modern, dynamic border around the central text.

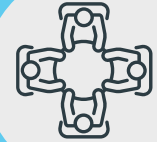
The Context of Non-profit Leadership

The Context of Non-profit Leadership



**The Non-profit leadership
Role itself**

Governance Structures



The 'Overhead Myth'

Corporate-Colonial Systems



**Tokenism and the DEI
Window**

**Us and Them HR and
Union structures**

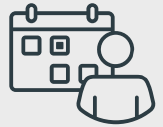


Systemic or Service

**Revenue and the
structures of Money**



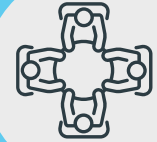
The Context of Non-profit Leadership



The Non-profit Leadership Role Itself

- ☐ Isolating
- ☐ Demands too many areas of expertise
- ☐ Program/purpose expert or leadership/manager expert?
- ☐ Multiple accountabilities

Governance Structures



- ☐ Volunteer boards
- ☐ Lack of clarity re operations/governance
- ☐ Authority without expertise
- ☐ The quiet problem

The Context of Non-profit Leadership



The 'Overhead Myth'

- ☐ Lack of admin support
- ☐ What actually does 'admin' mean?
- ☐ Networks, professional development, and community building?
- ☐ Impact without investment?

Corporate-Colonial Systems



- ☐ Growth is always good
- ☐ Myth of subjectivity
- ☐ Robert's Rules and other systems of exclusion
- ☐ Decolonizing, uncolonizing and the newness of public language

The Context of Non-profit Leadership



Tokenism and the DEI Window

- ☐ Racialized Women and the impact of performative DEI
- ☐ Disempowerment versus empowerment
- ☐ The Cost of Emotional labour
- ☐ The closing window: backlash and burnout

Us and Them HR and Union structures



- ☐ The costs of growth
- ☐ The employer-driven solution to leadership distance (Human Resources)
- ☐ The employee-driven solution to leadership distance (Unionization)
- ☐ The impact of Us and Them

The Context of Non-profit Leadership



Systemic or Service

- ☐ Direct service and the joy of helping
- ☐ Systemic advocacy and the joy of change
- ☐ The invisibility of systemic change
- ☐ Babies in the river

Revenue and the structures of Money



- ☐ The power of money
- ☐ Translating the need to purse holders
- ☐ Multiple sources, multiple infrastructures
- ☐ Money systems versus purpose-systems

Strategies for Navigating Context

**Purpose-Driven
leadership**

**Co and Shared
Leadership
Models**

**Communities of
Practice and
Peer Networks**

**Challenging
Corporate-
Colonial
Assumptions**

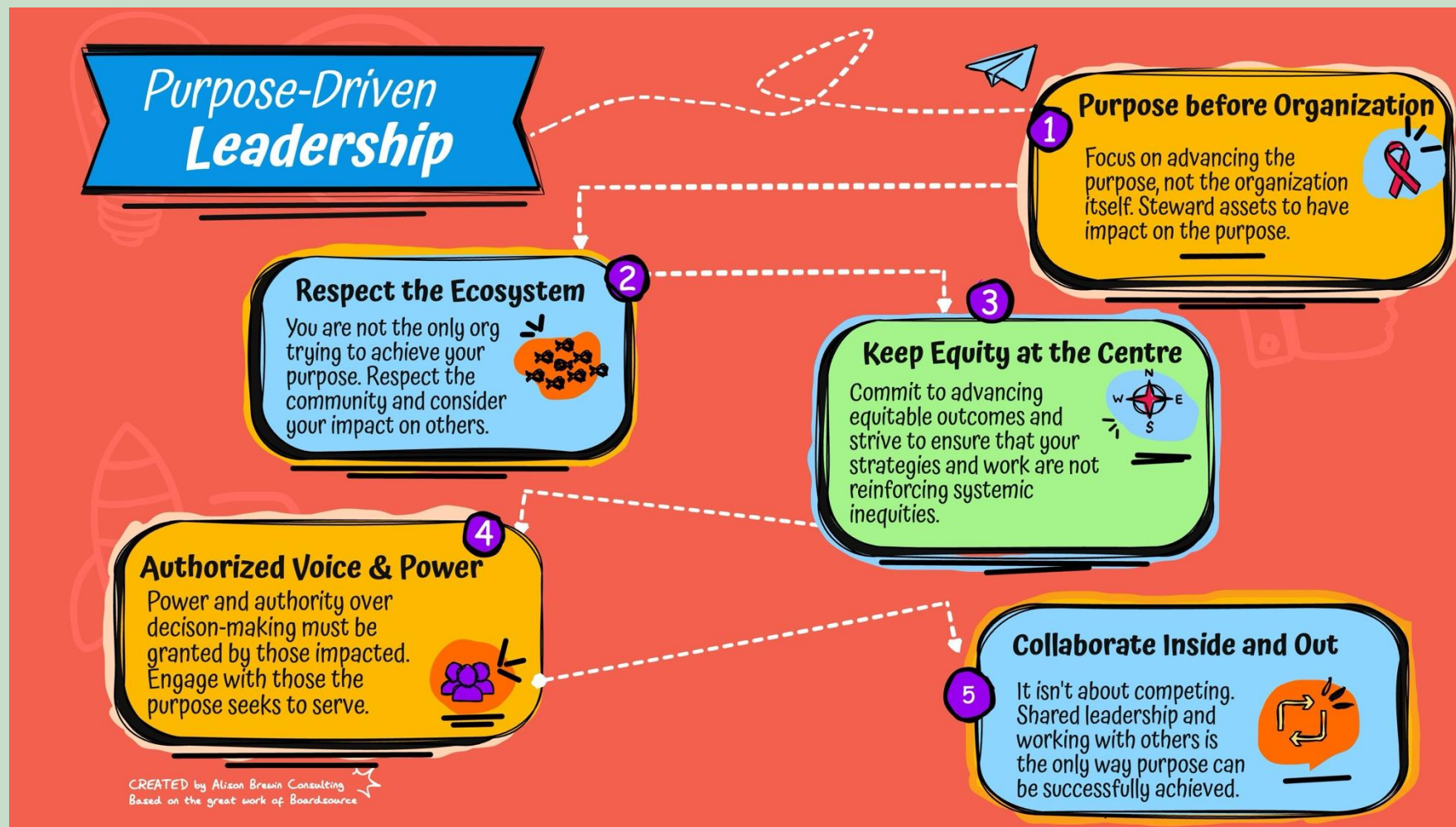
**Leading a
Learning Culture**

**Leadership as
Community
Engagement**

Pride as Healing



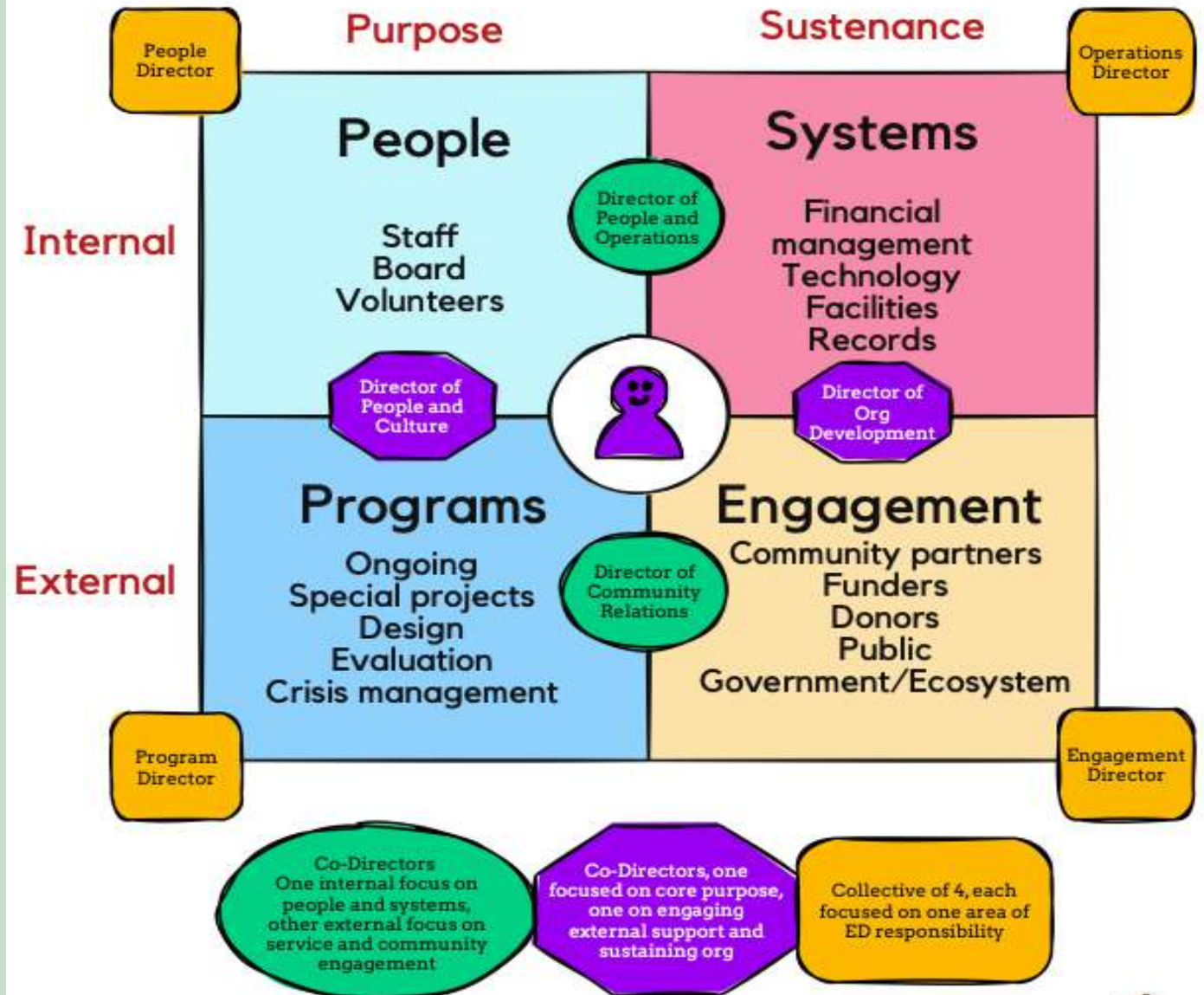
Purpose-Driven leadership



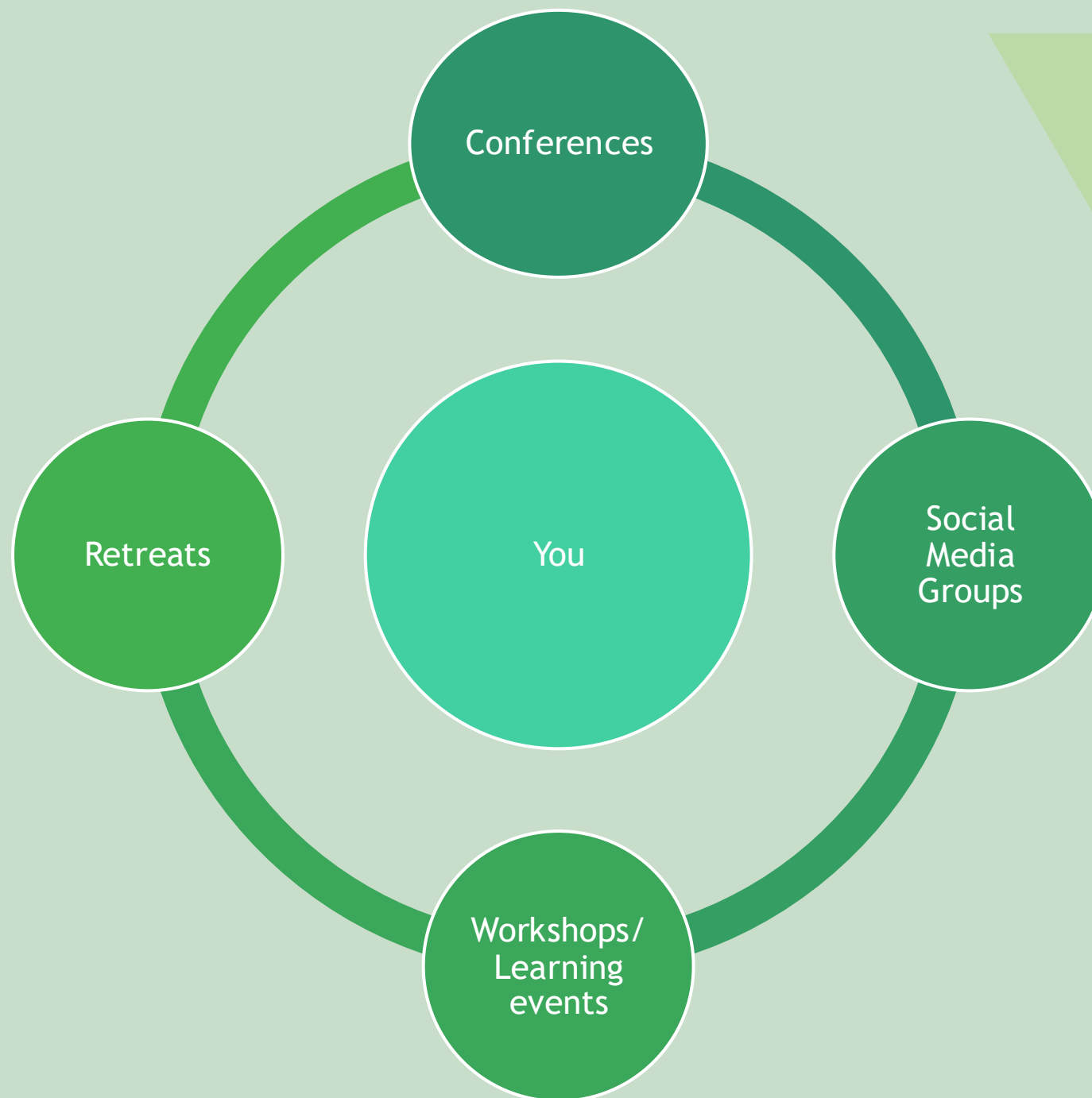
Co and Shared Leadership Models



Sharing the Executive Director Role



**Communities of
Practice and Peer
Networks**



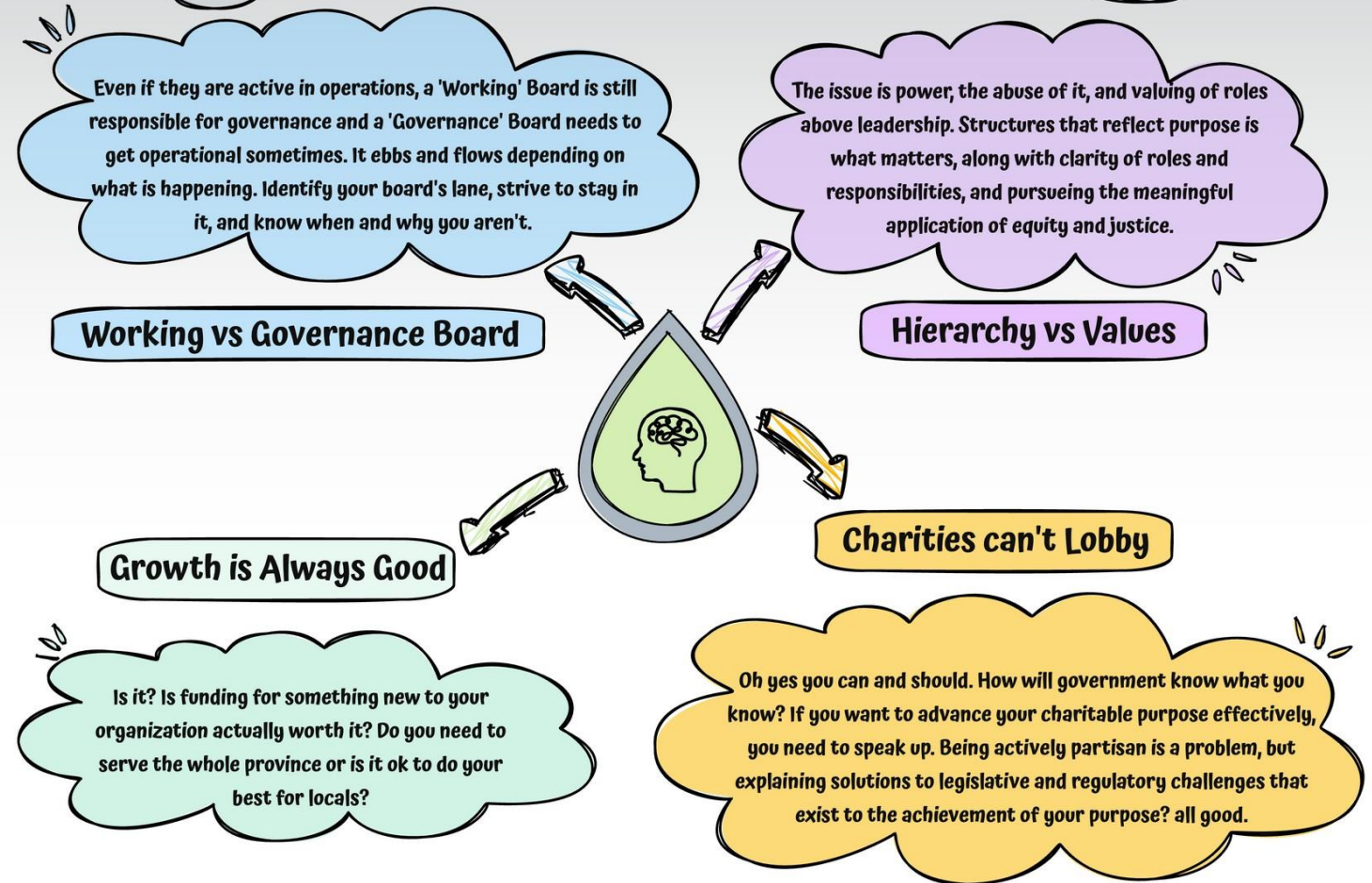
Challenging Corporate-Colonial Assumptions

De-Bunking Robert's Rules of Order:

- Sociocracy
- Martha's Rules
- Consensus
- Pre, during, post-meeting agreements



Debunking Common Myths in the Non-Profit Sector



Leading a Learning Culture

5 ELEMENTS OF A GREAT NON-PROFIT WORKPLACE



1

PURPOSE

Is the role connected to the org purpose?
Is it clear how the tasks contribute to org aspirations and goals?
Does the job give the person a sense of purpose?



2

INCLUSION

What is the culture and protocol around connecting new people to the team?
Is anyone checking in with them to see if they have questions?
Do they know they are welcome to be their whole self? Are they welcome to be their whole self?



3

TRANSPARENCY AKA VISIBILITY

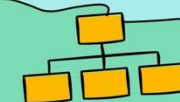
Can people see the through-lines between decisions and actions?
Do people have factual information they can rely on?
Is there too much room for created narrative (aka gossip)?



4

HEALTHY GOVERNANCE

Who is responsible for what kinds of decisions?
Are people left to get on with making judgement calls within their scope of authority?
Do they trust bringing in-decision to others, particularly those above them in the formal and informal hierarchies? Can they say they aren't sure without someone taking the decision away?



5

LEARNING CULTURE

Can people make mistakes?
Are there opportunities for mentoring, cross-training, shadowing?
Do people know when to focus and when to debrief/evaluate?
How are things improved?



Leadership as Community Engagement



4 Tips For Leadership through Community Development

- 1. You inform**
More than inform, you share information and check for understanding because you may need to provide it in a variety of ways.
- 2. You Consult**
In a real way, creating spaces for healthy conflict, sharing of lived and professional experience, and making it possible for people to contribute their best selves.
- 3. You Collaborate**
You genuinely seek ways to work in partnership on plans and solutions for pursuing your shared purposes.
- 4. You empower leadership**
You strive to empower leadership in and from others, and lift others into their strengths.

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Pride as Healing

To Slay Burnout and Stress

1 Pride creates visibility and breaks down isolation

By feeling and expressing pride, we push away the forces that benefit from our invisibility.



2 Pride counters shame and stigma.

It doesn't buy into mainstream assumptions about what success looks like.



3 Reclaiming identity from oppression

Pride explodes the myths, stereotypes and narratives that undermine our best selves.



4 Joy and Celebration are Tools for Resilience

Celebrating and seeking joy gives us strength, for ourselves and each other.



5 Public Affirmation contributes to social change

For those who don't know the experience, it builds allies and public support.



6 Community is a healing force

Being proud of who you really are lets you find your real partners and co-conspirators.



7 Narrative and story-telling has healing outcomes

Controlling the real story helps overcome the pain. Being heard is about sharing stories.



8 Pride is an act of Resistance

Against norms and values that devalue, dehumanize and minimize our reality



Pride as Healing



Questions

