



## OPERATIONAL PLANNING AND DESIGN

### *SITUATION*

A foundation had found that over time, its grantmaking processes had become unwieldy, functioning at a sub-optimal level of effectiveness. This problem came to light when senior management realized that staff members were serving on multiple internal task forces without a clear sense of purpose; everyone in the organization seemed to be extremely busy, yet not much was getting accomplished. The situation impeded the foundation's efforts to meet critical milestones, but also frustrated leaders and managers in the organization, who openly wondered why things weren't getting done. The organization was in danger of losing some highly valued professionals as a result of this well-intentioned but poorly executed situation.

### *ANALYSIS*

In an effort to integrate the various departments of the organization, its structure had been over-engineered and made far too complex, with lines of accountability becoming fuzzy or even nonexistent. As a result, the work of the organization—which everyone there was excited about in principle—was simply not getting done. The organization's original intention had been to create an environment of interdependence and collaboration—a noble goal—but instead had created only confusion and demoralization. Moreover, management had imposed this structure from on high, without soliciting any staff input or engagement in its development; the structure they ended up with neither addressed the day-to-day responsibilities of the staff nor the needs of the organization as a whole.

### *SOLUTION*

An audit of the day-to-day work of the staff revealed overlapping responsibilities, poorly articulated goals, and the lack of a process for arriving at clear frameworks for decision-making and accountability for getting things done. As neutral observers, we were able to see not only the value in what the organization had been trying to do, but also where the effort had gone awry. We recommended a retooling of the organization's structure to reflect what its mission—and the execution of that mission—actually required, in concrete terms, instead of an organizational chart based on vague, theoretical ideas of "collaboration". Once everyone in the organization was clear on what they were actually supposed to be doing, the sense of ennui that had been plaguing the organization was lifted, and there was a marked uptick in accomplishment and genuine, *natural* collaboration.