The New Way of Working is Sociocratic

A vision on New Ways of Working and change management in which both Sociocracy 3.0 and Non-Violent Communication play an important role.

The desire to change

More and more organizations want to revise their way of working. This desire to change can be felt in large and small companies, in almost every sector. Where does this momentum come from? Are we making a leap of consciousness, as described by Frederic Laloux in 'Reinventing Organizations' as Teal? Is it a coincidence that many people, certainly leaders in organizations, are currently going through a personal transition and getting closer to themselves?

The fact is that once this happens, it becomes easier to sense what is lacking in your own environment. For example, the structure and culture of the company where you work is no longer in line with your insights, with the needs of you and your colleagues, the market and even society. Our awareness of cooperation is growing and that is a beautiful thing. Are you also inspired by all kinds of beautiful examples? Are you also asking yourself how you can effectively increase equivalence, involvement and co-creation in your own team or organization? How you can propagate and experience this in your own work environment?

Change fitness

What is striking about the wish for change of companies is that the needs are often similar. Organizations want to increase employee ownership, hold constructive meetings and collaborate in mature, smart ways. They want to create more role clarity and feedback options for employees and teams and better allocate the decision-making power in the organization. Preferably without the entire organization immediately being turned upside down. So, what's a safe way to get started? What can you start with? How can you mobilize support for such change?

these are valuable questions. In order to become a smart and fast-learning organization, it is necessary to experiment, adjust and build change fitness. The changes will continue to come and at an increasing speed, so as an organization you will have to become more inventive and move faster. What is the best way to train your change muscle? Just like other muscles; by practicing a little every day. Small practical and feasible exercises.

Change fatigue

Changing does not mean that everyone has to start working from home immediately, that you have to transform all workplaces into landscape offices or that you have to become a self-managing organization in one fell swoop. Designing a change process for a company is very different today than it was ten years ago. Just as the vision, strategy and tasks were previously imposed by managers, new change processes were also rolled out top down, despite occasional consultation moments with co-workers from the work floor. That makes even the most flexible human being tired of change.

System change is not an all-in or one-size-fits-all story. Change processes are a lot more sustainable if they are built iteratively. By that I mean that sufficient feedback possibilities, safe pilot projects and feasible experiments are organized throughout the organization and that there is ownership and consent among those who are affected by the change. If adjustments are made on the basis of progressive insight and there is room for different speeds. Space also for the personal transformation that it requires. And the strange thing is that it ultimately goes much faster under these conditions.

System change starts with you

A statement about the implementation of New Ways of Working (NWOW) says that 80% of it is about changing behavior and culture. Maybe that's exaggerated. But working from home, attending virtual meetings, networking at the office and making decisions together or coaching employees requires different behavior from you. Behavior with which you may not have experience (as yet) and in which you must both direct and question yourself more. Whatever role you fulfill.

Cultural change is frightening because it requires you to reflect upon yourself and investigate what lives in you. To share tensions instead of bypassing them. What does the resistance you have tell you? Vulnerability lies behind a lot of behavior. How can you regulate your emotions and communicate in a non-violent way? In this area, both formal and informal leaders in organizations today have excellent opportunities to be a role model.
That is to Be The Change.

The key question: How can you invite other behavior in the organization?

You could also say: How can we deal with each other in a more mature way? If you invite more ownership and self-government into the workplace, as an organization you will need a culture based on trust and maturity. Trust in yourself and trust in the other. Insight into your own needs and attention to the needs of others. Such a culture does not just happen.

What helps is to raise awareness about the culture (or cultures) that is (are) present today. Which culture do you represent? What are the dominant voices that get a lot of attention and which perspectives are underused? What also helps is practise with processes that automatically induce a different behavior in you and appeal to your ingrained sense of respect and justice. Practices that incorporate the equal treatment of all votes.
And finally, it helps to invite and live on a philosophy that sees value in opposite visions, actively asks for concerns and objections, and helps to identify areas for improvement in a non-violent and engaging way.

Navigating through tensions is using the full potential of your organization

In fact, I have been talking about [Sociocracy 3.0](), or S3. S3 is a modular guide full of processes and guidelines (called patterns) that invites the culture described above step by step and thereby significantly increases the agility, resilience and integrity of your organization. The S3 pattern 'Consent Decision Making' ensures, for example, that decisions are made more carefully and that they are supported. By applying S3 patterns everyone feels heard and it becomes safe to take ownership, to contribute effectively to the organization and to be transparent.

The underlying philosophy has a long tradition. The term was first used by Auguste Comte in 1851 and developed strongly in England, the Netherlands and the US as the Sociocratic Circle Organization method. Among other things, Holacracy and S3 have been derived from that point. The philosophy assumes that wisdom is scattered throughout the organization and that all members are invited to pick up and bring up tensions in the system. And to act upon them if they are found to be relevant. This way everyone contributes to the organization. For me, S3 is a very suitable tool for developing Teal awareness.

The strength of S3 lies in the fact that, in addition to sociocratic principles such as navigating via tension, consent decision making and equivalence, it is based just as hard on agile principles such as continuous improvement, goal-oriented working and incorporating feedback. You move forward unless there is good reason not to. If something is 'good enough for now and safe enough to try', you go for it. That way, the organization gets smarter together fast. S3 combines the best of both worlds, for which we are grateful to developers James Priest, Bernard Bockelbrink and Lili David.

How Sociocracy 3.0 works

If you start using S3 patterns, you will soon notice that they have a self-correcting capacity. Working in a sociocratic manner naturally facilitates respectful cooperation and listening to each other, making it less necessary to respond from a protective ego. That must be one of the reasons why Sociocracy 3.0 is received so enthusiastically in so many places.

There are more than 70 patterns that reinforce each other, all of which can also be used separately. There are seven guiding principles behind these patterns: consent, equivalence, transparency, accountability, empiricism, effectiveness and continuous improvement. There is no specific starting point, but if you do not endorse the guiding principles, the S3 practices will not stick. Often the following applies: discover the tensions and start where the greatest need is and the difference will be most strongly noticed.

What is a safe way to start?

Among other things, you can create safety by trying out an S3 pattern as an experiment and then compare it with current practices. Many organizations start with meeting practices from Sociocracy 3.0 and immediately notice the effect. Evaluation is also a good start. The 'Peer Review' pattern gives ownership to the person who performs the role. This person starts the evaluation after which the other participants supplement their own appreciations and improvement suggestions and then jointly draw up a development plan. This makes the process a lot more valuable and constructive in comparison to 360-degree evaluations. Peer Review is also very suitable for deployment at team level.
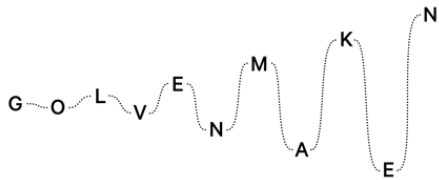
You gain support for a decision or approach by asking for consent: actively inviting concerns and objections and listening to the argument behind the objection. This requires a new attitude, self-reflection and proposals instead of decisions. So the processes of Sociocracy 3.0 also encourage us to unlearn things.

Sustainability through a multi-perspective

Should you aim to become fully self-managed and self-governed? No, self-steering is not a goal in itself. Every organization needs vision holders; formal and informal leaders who serve as benchmarks for the culture and who monitor the organization's purpose, security and integrity of the system. Self-governance refers to shared decision making power and shared leadership. As an organization you want to achieve as much impact as possible. And the impact at the outside, in the market, is much greater if the impact towards the inside is also large. If every member can contribute to that impact to full capacity and from her or his own perspective. Organizations that manage to use this 'multi-perspective' constructively live the longest. Just as in nature and society, it is the diversity in organizations that makes the system so strong.

I warmly invite you to continue reading about Sociocracy 3.0 and organizational support on my Golven Maken website (in Dutch) or at the Sociocracy30.org website, on which you can find resources and learning materials in multiple languages.

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