



Setting Up Self Organizing Circles

Self-organizing patterns are modeled in natural systems and create distributed and yet coordinated, nested architectures that allow for thriving complex and adaptive systems to create mutual exchange and collaboration while honoring the wholeness and autonomy of any single individual within an organization or group.

Some examples of cooperative governance models are sociocratic or dynamic governance frameworks. The following are some examples of how to set up self organizing circles with these governance models as guides. These basic processes and practices can be customized to fit the context of the group in order to ensure authentic relevance to a particular group.

THE BASICS

Sociocratic or Dynamic Governance design is based on stewardship by participatory processes. A "Core" or "General" council circle is established to hold the core social DNA or culture of a group and then generate nested project or purpose based circles to effectively advance key areas of focus or activities. Champions are selected to support the coordination of the smaller circles and representatives are selected from each circle to be a liaison between that circle and the "Core/General" council via a double linking mechanism for two way communication and sensemaking.

FORMING THE CORE

First step is for initial participants who find themselves gravitating together for a shared purpose to form the "Core" of willing stewards to support the founding of the group. This becomes the foundation group for the "Core" or "General" Council to seed a group from. of the group as well as the pattern for seeding sub groups using sociocratic or dynamic governance structures and processes.

This group can use initial decision making processes such as resonance or consensus (* See the "Decision Making Menu" Resource for more information) to inform and guide the formation of the social foundations (* See the Alignment Processes" Resource for

more information on developing culture, values, alignment, purpose, etc.) of the group. This group can also determine who else should be invited, determine the pattern and processes for seeding sub groups, and support the foundational building process for forming initial collaborative structures.

This group can then guide the process of inviting and aligning additional players, determining initial project or purpose circles, and facilitating the initial set of calls to establish the shared field of collaboration and leadership for the group.

This Core group/circle/council becomes the coherence holder for the entire system. Here is where using CIRCULAR LEADERSHIP based principles for co-stewarding the council through guiding decision making, governance design, developing processes/ protocols, determining structures, activities, and ensuring regular assessment of the groups' alignment to the north star or the over-all direction of the group happens.

The Core council can help a group to determine any best practices, social protocols, guiding principles or values to ensure the alignment to an ethical and/or collaborative foundation. (** See the Alignment Processes” Resource for more information on developing culture, values, alignment, purpose, etc.)*)

SEEDING THE CIRCLES

As project or purpose circles emerge for specific topics or areas of activity within the group, the Core council can support each additional circle to establish self-organizing leadership by identifying a "champion" or group of champions to take on initial scheduling, communication, cadence, and coordination for members who would like to participate in the circle as "contributors".

Seeding a new circle includes providing the decision making menu and initial method for documenting meeting notes in a shared space.

As new circles emerge, the social protocols or “DNA” are seeded into the center of a new circle to help guide collaboration and maintain inter-connectivity of the group as a whole.

SELF ORGANIZING CIRCLES

Champions of focused circles agree to hold coordinative functions- scheduling, reminders, helping to set agenda, perhaps facilitating or co-facilitating, sharing notes/outputs with the rest of the group, etc.

The group will collaboratively establish the circle's intended focus of activities and determine its unique values & any best practices based on each "circle's" needs.

The project or purpose circles are tasked with designing processes that work for that unique group's needs, determining cadence of meetings, outlining key goals or objectives, identifying key activities or deliverables, setting up shared workspaces, determining who will contribute in what ways, and then ensuring updates are shared with the circle representative who will be reporting back to the Core council.

SOME TIPS FOR CIRCLES

- Use a decision making menu of suggested tools and processes for possible use in sense-making & decision-making
- Adopt some basic communication channels/methods, communication practices and some light weight tension revelation protocols for ensuring effective collaboration.
- When appropriate, create distinction in types of meetings- things like policy/governance and/or tactile/operational, with a cultural/social to weave between or create an agenda that weaves topics thoughtfully.
- Engage multi-stakeholder stewardship of the circle for coherence- circles tend to work best if there is circular leadership and clear ways to contribute and participate.
- Create processes/tools for assigning tasks, tracking progress of deliverables, tracking & acknowledging contributions, etc.
- Create process for how the structures evolve as group changes/matures (processes can include methods for presenting proposals, facilitating reviews, determining decisions, implementation)
- Create methods for supporting the effectiveness of the "double linking" functions- such as methods for updates and report backs

DOUBLE LINKING REPRESENTATION

In order to ensure representation of circles within the Core Council, and to create two way flows of shared leadership and sense-making, each circle will go through a process for the selection/election of "Representatives" to bridge the project/purpose circles and the Core Council.

This can be determined using consent or resonance based decision making (* See *the "Decision Making Menu" Resource for information*) to nominate or select and then approve representatives.

Each circle will create the mechanisms for ensuring that the Representative is informed in order to update at the Core Council meetings. The Core will ensure mechanisms for reporting information and decisions back to circles.