COMPARISON OF HOLACRACY AND SOCIOCRACY

This article is an attempt to map out the sameness of, and differences between, Holacracy and sociocracy... The differences are small, yet – depending on your values – significant. Knowing the difference gives you choice, and, hopefully, it supports more learning and constructive discussion to further our understanding of circle-and-role-based governance systems.

Nested circle and linking — There is a bit of difference of jargon here but doing my best to describe the concepts:

- Circles have autonomy in their domain, i.e. area(s) of responsibility/authority
- Circles are nested, i.e. can form a sub-circle and pass on some of their domain to that sub-circle super-circle/sub-circle pairs are connected by linking: one role links top-down, one role links bottom-up. The top-down link (“circle lead” in Holacracy/“leader” or other terms in sociocracy) supports all circle operations within that domain.
- Each circle also has a facilitator and a secretary plus additional process-related roles if desired (like a logbook keeper etc.)
- People act in roles; the basic idea of people focusing on the role and purpose, as well as the issue at hand is the same.

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Enlivening Edge (ENLVE)

Description:
Enlivening Edge is an international community of collaborators and Partners drawn together by a shared purpose—to nourish the growing ecosystem of Next-Stage (including Teal) organizations. We are interwoven in a global vanguard of people and organizations transforming their workplaces for the benefit of all.

Stakeholder(s):
Ted Rau:
Author — I’m a sociocracy person. I teach, consult and use sociocracy in my daily work life and in my living community.

Kees Boeke:
The term sociocracy (“governance by those who associate together”) is old and goes back as early as 1851. It was picked up and filled with life in the early 20th century by Kees Boeke and Betty Cadbury who founded a school using consensus decision making that had a student Gerard Endenburg who later became a electrical engineer and experimented with what was later called the Sociocratic Circle Method in Endenburg Elektronics. By the 1980’s, the basic principles were established: consent, selections by consent, nested circles and linking.

Betty Cadbury

Gerard Endenburg

Vision
Governance by consent

Mission
To map out the sameness of, and differences between, Holacracy and sociocracy

Values
Consent
Selection: selections by consent
Circles: nested circles and ...
Linkages: linking

Sociocracy: How they are the same -- Let’s start with the biggest piece: how sociocracy and Holacracy are the same.

Holacracy

Transparency: They both embrace radical transparency, experimentation and empiricism, empowered members, clarity of process, effectiveness and equality of peers. How do they do that? By using the following features:
Experimentation
Empiricism
Empowerment: empowered members
Clarity: clarity of process
Effectiveness
Equality
Peerism

**Rounds:** Process -- Rounds are used both in sociocracy and in Holacracy and it will depend on the culture of the organization how exhaustively rounds are being used and in what kinds of contexts. Check-ins and check-outs/meeting evaluations – in rounds – are used in both systems; depending on the context, the meeting formats for governance/policy meetings are very similar as well.
1. Decision Making

*Make decisions by the absence of objections.*

Consent and consent process — Both Holacracy and sociocracy are consent-based systems with the exact same definition of consent (‘a decision is made when there are no objections’). Consent is used to make governance/policy decisions that give people the freedom to carry out those decisions, making their own choices within that framework on a daily basis when doing their work. The steps of getting to consent are the same, even down to the labels — with some variation depending on trainers/coaches. Presenting the proposal, clarifying questions, quick reactions, objections/consent round, integrating objections. Holacracy calls it integrative decision-making, sociocracy calls it consent decision-making. Same thing.

1.1. Proposals

*Presenting the proposal.*

1.2. Questions

*Ask and answer clarifying questions.*

1.3. Reactions

*Solicit quick reactions.*

1.4. Objections & Consent

*Solicit objections and consent.*

1.5. Integration

*Integrate objections.*
2. Selection

*Select circle members.*

The selection process — The selection process for roles is also the same, again with some variation among trainers/coaches. Yet, they all boil down to: define the role, define the personal qualifications required to perform the role, provide time for people to think about who they’d nominate for the role, share nominations in a nomination round along with reasons, do a change round, make a proposal and make the decision by consent. Same thing.

2.1. Roles

*Define the roles.*

2.2. Qualifications

*Define the personal qualifications required to perform the roles.*

2.3. Cogitation

*Provide time for people to think about who they’d nominate for the role.*

2.4. Nominations

*Share nominations in a nomination round along with reasons.*

2.5. Changes

*Engage in a change round.*

2.6. Proposals

*Make proposals.*

2.7. Decision Making

*Make decisions by consent.*
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