Samantha Slade

GOING HORIZONTAL

CREATING A NON-HIERARCHICAL ORGANIZATION, ONE PRACTICE AT A TIME

Berrett–Koehler Publishers, Inc.
a BK Business book

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Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.
1333 Broadway, Suite 1000
Oakland, CA 94612–1921
Tel: (510) 817–2277
Fax: (510) 817–2278
www.bkconnection.com

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Printed in United States of America

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Slade, Samantha, author.
Title: Going horizontal : creating non-hierarchical organizations, one practice at a time / Samantha Slade.
Description: First edition. | Oakland, CA : Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., [2018] | Includes bibliographical references.
Identifiers: LCCN 2018024626 | ISBN 9781523095261 (pbk.)
Subjects: LCSH: Management. | Supervision. | Organizational behavior. | Organizational sociology.
Classification: LCC HD31.2 .S589 2018 | DDC 658—dc23 LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2018024626

First Edition

25 24 23 22 21 20 19 18 || 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Book produced by BookMatters, copyedited by Mike Mollett, proofed by Janet Reed Blake, and indexed by Leonard Rosenbaum. Illustrations by Paul Messer. Cover design by Paul Messer/Dan Tesser.

To all the brave souls on your bumpy path
to grow more horizontal ways of working,
in yourselves and around yourselves.
Your personal leadership is building
a better future for us all.

CONTENTS

PREFACE *ix*

INTRODUCTION *1*

ONE
Why Go Horizontal? *7*

TWO
Practicing Is the Path to Mastery *21*

THREE
Autonomy *32*
Claim Your Personal Leadership

FOUR
Purpose *56*
The Invisible Leader

FIVE
Meetings *73*
Sharing the Responsibilities and Accountability

SIX
Transparency *98*
Open Is Effective and Efficient

SEVEN
Decision Making *118*
Sharing the Power

EIGHT
Learning and Development *141*
Self-Directed and Collectively Held

NINE
Relationships and Conflicts *165*
Tending to Them Together

TEN
Where Do You Go from Here? *192*
Tapping In to the Opportunities That Surround You

APPENDIX
Percolab's Generative Decision-Making Process *211*

NOTES *219*

BIBLIOGRAPHY *225*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS *227*

INDEX *229*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR *239*

PREFACE

When I was twenty-one years old, I was studying cultural anthropology at McGill University in Montreal, Canada. In my lectures and textbooks, I was learning about the different ways societies organize themselves and about revolutions. It was the 1980s, and a revolution was going on in Nicaragua.

Nicaragua had received the distinguished UNESCO (United Nations Scientific, Educational, and Cultural Organization) honor for its bold and hugely successful literacy campaign that had increased literacy by almost 40 percent in only five months. The program had become an international inspiration. I was intrigued that this was achieved by educators working with thousands of youth groups. In fact, the country was going through a transformation, and the decentralized approaches to many aspects of the redesign fascinated me.

I became curious to speak directly to people about their experience and understand more. I decided to put my studies on hold for a year, and off I went, on my own, to Nicaragua.

Within minutes of entering the country, I was struck by the mood of the people. The bus was alive with good-natured banter and critique about the new shape the country was taking. There was one other foreigner on my bus from the border, a young man from Finland who was curious about the revolution like I was. People took our hands and, turning over our palms, laughed. If we did not have worker hands, how could we contribute to the revolution? Laughter and loud talk surrounded us. Everyone had an opinion on everything.

At the start of the revolution, it was said that 1 percent of the population owned 47 percent of the land. By way of agrarian reform, idle, underused, or abandoned properties were confiscated. The country debated about how to achieve fairer land ownership. Cooperative farms were growing. Some cooperatives that produced goods and services set up day care centers and social programs for their workers. I volunteered at the day care center and summer school of a cigar-producing cooperative. The impact of the famous Nicaraguan literacy campaign was tangible.[1] The campaign was designed for wider social transformation governed with multiple civil society actors at the national, departmental, and municipal levels. Thousands of secondary and university students and teachers volunteered for five months to teach literacy in rural areas while living and working with peasant families. The program was intentionally bridging socioeconomic divides. A similar initiative was going on in the medical field to bring medicine to rural areas, and a cultural initiative was capturing rural folktales, music, and customs

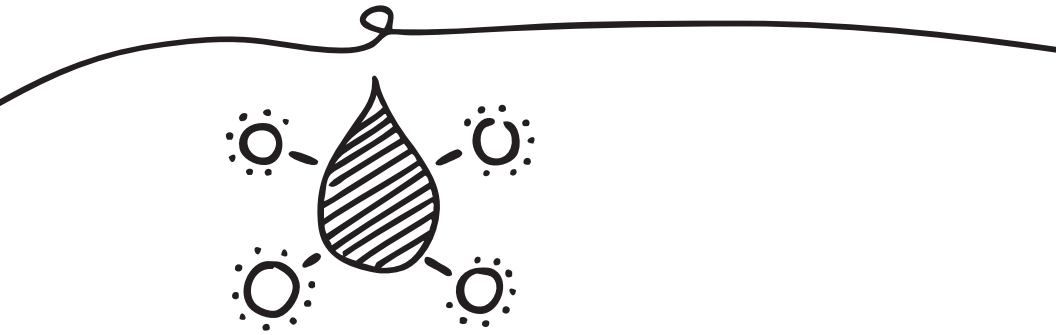
and funneling these stories back into the literacy initiative. The reform was managed in a responsive way rather than being preplanned, making use of a network of 47 shortwave radios.

The new government was accelerating culture with nationwide poetry workshops and culture centers. During this time Nicaragua became the world capital of murals. Artists, both local and international, created outdoor democratic museums. There was a sense of possibility of a different type of country, but there was also a great deal of economic hardship. The economy was out of control, and prices were rising rapidly. The price of a restaurant meal could double by the time you finished eating. War was raging in the jungle. I was trained to protect myself from random armed attacks of the Contras.

Observing these changes in Nicaragua, I gained an awareness that we create the systems we live in, but we can also change them. The organizational and institutional forms we take for granted are but one model, and many more models are possible. I learned the power of decentralized actions and had my first experience of cooperative approaches. The literacy approach and the results it achieved still stand as one of the most astonishing today.

Later, I was drawn to education as a way to improve our society in Canada. I became a teacher, taught teachers, developed curriculum and learning materials, and ended up advising on policy in a Canadian ministry of education. It was a long and rich journey to the discovery that effecting change as a bureaucrat was not a match for me—the ideal place for me to effect change was in fact as an entrepreneur. I wanted to participate in the action.

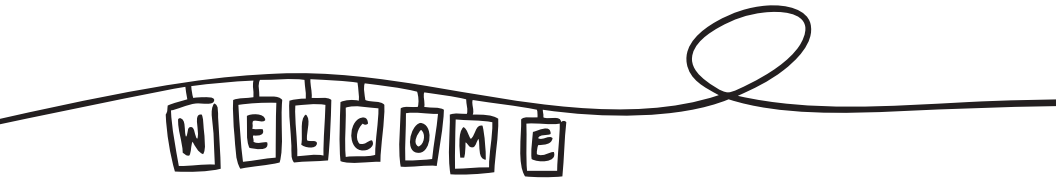
At the age of 40, I left my government job and co-founded a business, Percolab, that would be a full-on experiment of what a company can be. Percolab is a co-design and co-creation firm that provides support to organizations and ecosystems to step into their futures. It is all about rolling up our sleeves to try out a more participatory and collaborative culture. Each Percolab office is employee managed, and the entire network is self-governed.



We now have more than 10 years of applied ethnographic observation through the fine-tuning of our experimental operational system and organizational culture and our varied client work in multiple countries. Along with my colleagues and the wider community, I have been making sense of the patterns and the practices that have emerged while living with them and experimenting with them. Beyond the theories and science, I live with and witness the difference that more participatory ways and flatter organizations can make. I have been geeking out, collecting practices and trying them out with teams, clients, and allies for so long that I am full of enthusiasm about all that is possible. Now it is time for me

to share. I hear the need and the hunger, for I realize what a unique opportunity it is to have this playing field to try out these practices with others. This book takes all I have learned over the years and passes it back to the field. My background in education and anthropology have been put to more use than I could ever have imagined. Over time I find myself bumping into others, all over the planet, who feel similarly and are stepping away from the traditional ways of doing work and business to create something that makes more sense. People are hungry for resources to help them. It is still a pioneering field that goes by many names. Some call it "participatory leadership" or "collective leadership," others call it "self-managing organizations" or "self-governing organizations," and still others call it "employee-led organizations" or "co-managed organizations." I have chosen to use the terms "horizontal" and "non-hierarchical" for this book. I use them interchangeably. They feel expansive enough to encompass this field. I trust that my experiences, errors, and years of sensemaking can be a constructive source for others.

INTRODUCTION

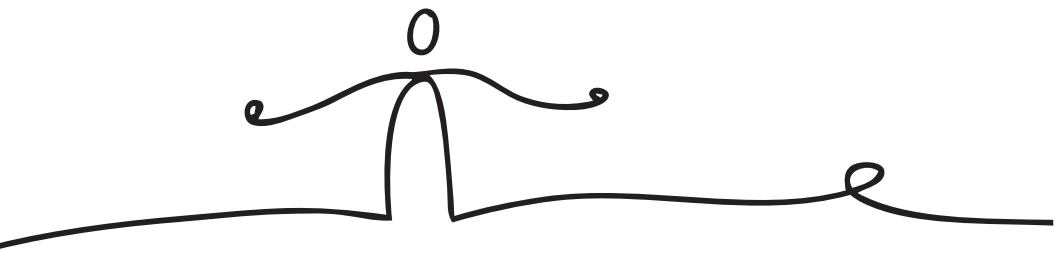


If you are interested in developing your understanding and capacity in horizontal practices, this book is for you. It doesn't matter if you work within an organization or if you are a member of a group or club or a freelancer or student. No matter what your experience with horizontal organizations, welcome!

This book should help you get further clarity and move forward from wherever you are. The practices in this book can help you step away from fear-based thinking that a plan and control culture strengthens. They help you get back to trusting one another, and they start with you. They help anyone at any level of an organization—from the CEO who wants to take an entire organization horizontal to the entry-level assistant who sees a bright future in this work. Whether you

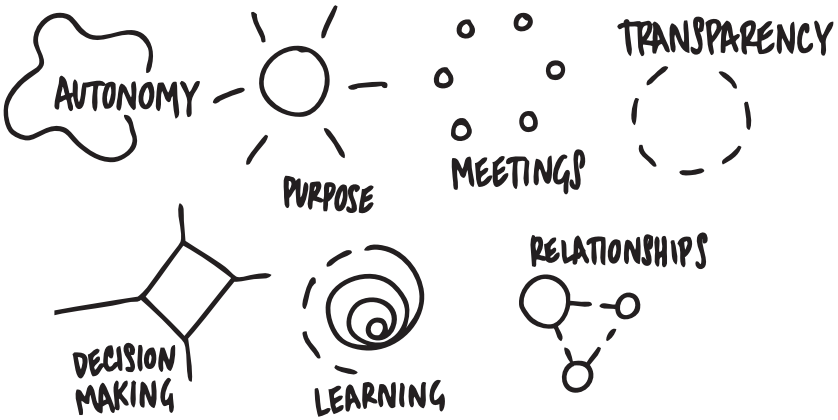
are the CEO or the assistant, you will want to start with your own actions, and only then look outward to the rest of your organization.

It doesn't matter if your organization is well into its non-hierarchical journey, just starting, or even dead set against horizontal ways; this book should be helpful for you because it meets you where you are. The most important requirement is that you are curious and want to learn more. We each arrive to this possibility with different questions. How do you get people to enjoy their work and take initiative? How can the organization be more democratic, participatory, co-creative? How do you keep brilliant team members from leaving? How can your organization embody your values better? At one point the questions become more personal. What do I want it to be in this team, this organization, this community? How am I moving this forward? This book is not about examining what is wrong with your organization or your colleagues; instead, it is about your own non-hierarchical mind-set and ways. How are *you* embodying non-hierarchical practices, and where can they deepen and expand?

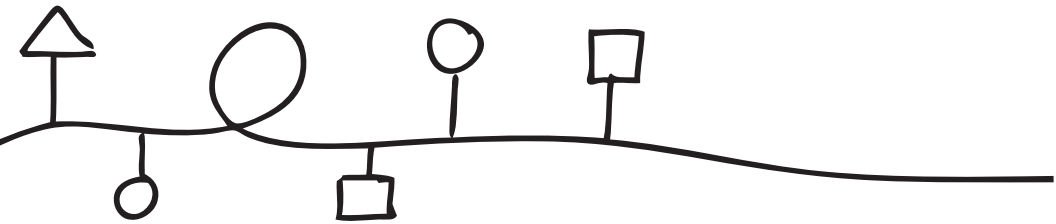


Everywhere I go, when I talk about how we have cornered ourselves into habits and ways of working, ways that don't make sense, people nod in agreement. Rarely does that statement get challenged. When I add, "and we are not quite sure

how to move things along," the nod is even more emphatic. It's an acknowledgment that something is amiss in our organizations and that we are confused about finding a path forward. This book offers supportive frameworks to help you get beyond the current hierarchical culture we have become accustomed to. The practices and structures in this book will help you cultivate and grow non-hierarchical culture in your organization. By starting with yourself, you can give space and opportunity to grow the non-hierarchical ways in others around you.

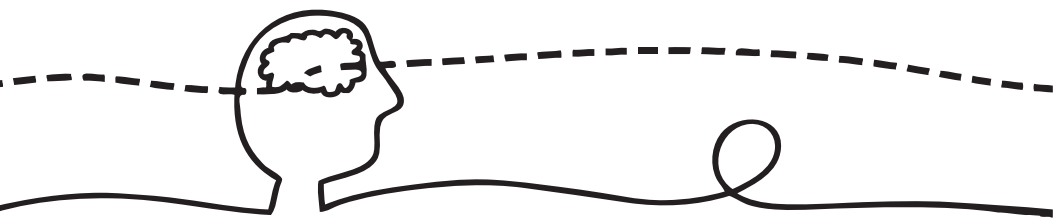


The book is organized into chapters on the seven domains of practice that are common to most all organizations: autonomy, purpose, meetings, transparency, decision making, learning and development, and relationships and conflict. In each of these chapters, I explain why the domain of practice is critical to horizontal organizations and mind-set, I offer ways to recognize how similar horizontal practices might be



showing up in your life outside of work, and I lay out some foundational practices of each domain that you can start using in your organization right away. Throughout the book you are invited to do regular exercises that will help you take the practices into your organizational context—mapping your organizational culture, reflecting on how you would want to be functioning, and exploring possibilities around you.

The book includes a sprinkling of models and theory to ground the work. The final chapter serves to guide you into strategic actions for your specific organizational context and requires that you have read all the preceding chapters. There is an order to the practice domains that are presented in the book, as together they constitute a comprehensive path into horizontal habits. At the same time, if a particular domain is pulling you in, know that each chapter stands on its own and you can jump back and forth. This book helps you develop new ways of seeing the daily details of your organization and how you do things, understand the differences between behaviors that support a hierarchical or non-hierarchical mindset, and look at the complexity those behaviors interconnect with.



You will find ways to try out new behaviors for yourself and with others. Maybe you will start outside of work or in informal groups before you bring them into work. Maybe you have perfect opportunities right in front of you that this book will help you see. The idea is to start small with consciousness and then to grow and widen, always keeping the focus on lived experience. One thing that you will need to be uncompromising about is the following: *you* are the prototype space. Stop proposing for others and start with yourself.

Chances are, you will be both validated and challenged in things that you are doing. We do not need to wait for some higher authority to give us permission to embark on a non-hierarchical journey. The journey starts with each of us. This is everyone's work. Many books target leaders, and that is important because leaders have the power to change the organizational structure. However, because a horizontal culture includes everyone, this book speaks to everyone in the organization.

ONE

WHY GO HORIZONTAL?

There is no need to wait for permission from hierarchy to begin practicing non-hierarchical ways.

Human Nature Is Non-hierarchical

Non-hierarchical ways are the modus operandi of human beings. They are part of our DNA. Like geese flying south and bears hibernating, we are a self-organizing species.

We function every day without a boss. We feed ourselves, keep up our homes, care for each other, plan big projects, celebrate victories, and mourn losses. Every day, we organize ourselves with those around us, adult to adult. We figure things out together. Most of the time, we appreciate the input and support others offer. When that support tips into telling us what to do, we get wary. We are properly allergic to the notion that someone could have the power over us to make us do something we don't want to do. For the most part, we

figure out how to work with different opinions, preferences, and perspectives. We manage to accomplish things together, whether it is building a snowman or organizing a birthday party. If a friend or partner tries to "manage" what we do, decide, or think, that can compromise the relationship. We tend to stay in our various communities as long as they are non-hierarchical. Simply put, we need horizontal workplaces because we are naturally a horizontal species. Working against this instinct is what has lead us to a world where 85 percent of people are disengaged from their work, *work* itself is a negative word, and movies like *Office Space* become cult classics of catharsis. We can do better!

In my workshops I ask participants to identify examples from their personal lives where they figure things out with others, without anyone having authority over another. We don't tend to think about our world in this way. People really struggle to find examples, though in reality they abound: we decide what music is played in the house, we get groceries for the house, we get married to whom we want. We cross paths with people we know and don't know at the grocery store, the swimming pool, the park, without anyone telling us what to do. There is no chain of command in daily life. This is not to say that it is easy, but I think it is fair to say we wouldn't want it any other way. The other way is the making of science fiction scenarios.

Non-hierarchical Ways Are Possible and Present in the Workplace

Despite human nature being horizontal, the organizational model and culture we have given ourselves for work is vertical. Of course, you can't just take non-hierarchical ways from the personal realm into the work realm. There are some fundamental differences that need to be taken into account. At work we are contractually tied to our organizations through formal agreements that we are bound to. We receive regular paychecks that we rely upon. We are accountable to the organization and its purpose. We are under pressure to perform and ensure financial viability. We must adhere to a whole body of legal requirements.

While our organizations could have developed in non-hierarchical ways, and there are many examples of non-hierarchical societies throughout history and across cultures, the model that prevailed was a vertical one. Some might say it was for the sake of efficiency and scale, though there are examples of efficient large-scale non-hierarchical organizations. Others might point out that it was a model that supported the extractive and colonialist values of earlier times. Certainly, human well-being was not the focus at the origins of the hierarchical organizational model. The result today is such that the current dominant organizational culture and structure is not aligned to human nature.

When I am brought into an organization to help them with this transition, I often hear things like "This organizational chart might look vertical, but really we invite you to talk to people in the company as if it were horizontal." Or, from someone in upper management, "I'm not really the boss; people don't even use that term with me." This is not going horizontal; it is hierarchy that likes to pretend that it is not, that pays lip service to the concept without doing the real shift.

When I speak to people who truly love their work, they say things like "My boss trusts me" or "I have freedom to do what I want" or "I'm encouraged to try things out." All these statements are elements of more human, natural ways of functioning whereby people feel like they are being treated with mutual trust and care, as adults. In many places human beings are being treated fairly as equals despite the vertical culture. In many other places, just the opposite is true. You know where you stand with your own stories and experiences.

Hierarchy Won't Take Us into Our Future

The 9 to 5 office with the hierarchical organizational chart is showing serious signs of fraying. The dominant management model is expensive. Management experts Gary Hamel and Michele Zanini estimate that the cost of micromanagement is $3 trillion annually in the United States alone.[2] The human cost is also alarming. Worker engagement is not getting better despite the billion-dollar industry making efforts to effect improvement. Only 15 percent of the world's workforce are actively engaged in their jobs.[3]

The major sources of psychological distress in the workplace are connected to hierarchical culture: poor relationship with one's superior, lack of recognition, and low participation in decision making and governance.[4] Furthermore, organizations are struggling to attract and keep employees. High-talent individuals are leaving the workplace to seek out greater learning and development.[5] Organizations face workforce challenges that are a serious issue and a growing trend. This trend touches me deeply. Human suffering increases with our current model.

In the meantime we are entering a new era. We are finding a general nonacceptance of many organizational practices that used to be tolerated: from inequity in pay to rigid rules. Professionals are honing their personal brands and positioning themselves for a market in which employers are competing among themselves to hire them. The freelance market continues to grow and organize into collectives to provide shared services and social safety nets usually offered by employers.[6] Networked organizations are growing. A parallel infrastructure of co-working networks and wholly decentralized companies is growing for digital nomads and location-independent workers who care about freedom and beauty in their workspace. The upcoming workforce is connected to so much information, possibility, and creativity that

the traditional vertical organizational system seems underequipped to tap into its full potential.[7] The internet mind-set is not a hierarchical mind-set. Millennials do not understand why information and authority cannot be dynamic and flowing. When an organization shifts to a transparent culture of shared power and mutual responsibility and care, then it can truly begin to respond to the challenges modern organizations are facing. A recent report on the future of organizations concludes that the ability to "scale trust" is key for the organization of the future to offer space for the new worker.[8]

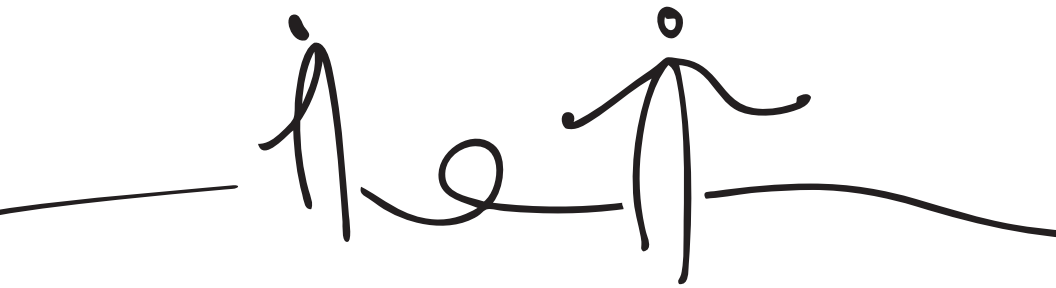
Artificial intelligence is poised to shake our work world. Some say 40 percent of today's jobs will disappear.[9] We know that the obedience and compliance mind-set that standardization bred will need to give way to empathy, creativity, and real-time decision making, for example. These capacities are valued and thrive in horizontal cultures.

Depending on your perspective, all this can be an invitation, an opportunity, or a wake-up call to revisit what we have been taking for granted in the way our organizations function. The work is deeper than we might have envisioned; it requires new mind-sets, new personal and collective practices, and new organizational models. There are no recipes for the depth of what it involves. It is beyond an issue of productivity; it speaks to the question of how we want to be together as human beings.

Non-hierarchical ways are needed for a future functioning organizational culture, and they are well positioned for the expectations and culture of the upcoming generation.

What Does a Successful Horizontal Organizational Mind-Set Look Like?

Horizontal ways deal with the pervasive and detrimental issue of organizational disengagement and positively contribute to the mental well-being of humans. When humans are taken care of, they get things done, and that is what organizations need: to stay in movement, to stay ahead, to stay relevant. Let's look at some specifics: when we say employees are more engaged, what does that mean? Here are some traits that show the difference:



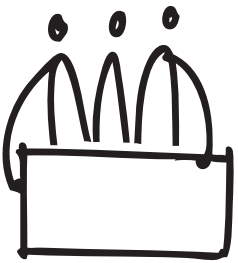
Disengaged worker	Engaged worker
Executes tasks, avoids work	Shows up and works with spirit and care
Has little desire to learn new things	Is curious and proactive to grow and develop
Complains, blames, victimizes	Contributes ideas, offers support for others
Shows indifference toward colleagues	Invests in colleagues and relationships
Shows indifference toward the organization's success	Imagines possibilities, co-creates, proposes

Buurtzorg is a home-care company in the Netherlands that was created in 2007 with a horizontal structure. The organization is based on trust and works with small teams of 10 to 12 nurses who have the authority to do what would usually be done at the management level—human resources functions, budgeting, scheduling, and performance reviews. A central office of 50 people supports (not manages) the 14,000 nurses. After seven years of existence, Buurtzorg had taken two-thirds of the market in the Netherlands. Today, Buurtzorg is expanding around the world to countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Japan, and China. The organization has been the subject of studies that demonstrate how it is a success in achieving high levels of client satisfaction, employee well-being, and profitability.[10]

Here are five indicators of a successful non-hierarchical organization. Keep in mind that this is the gold standard; these metrics can take years of small iterative changes to achieve.

1. Colleagues hold each other accountable, and responsibility is shared.

Some people think a that non-hierarchical mind-set means no management at all. The reality is quite the opposite: a non-hierarchical mind-set holds everyone to a higher standard.

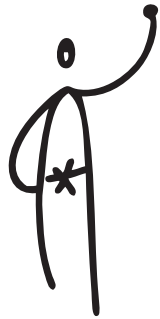


Many activities that managers once were responsible for are distributed, and thus the responsibility becomes shared. A whole team participates in the activities that a single manager would usually hold: setting objectives, organizing work to be done, setting pay, supporting and motivating one another, holding one an-

other accountable to performance, and supporting one another's development.

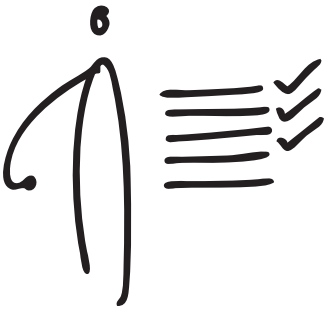
2. People own their personal leadership.

The premise of a horizontal mind-set is that people can figure things out for themselves, among themselves. There is no need to have someone with authority give permission or approval or do things on behalf of others. We have come to think of leaders as those persons at the top of the organization. This association is false. A non-hierarchical mind-set is about owning our personal leadership no matter where we might be positioned in an organization, no matter the nature of our work. If we see something not working, we act on it. We take care of things, and we make proposals.



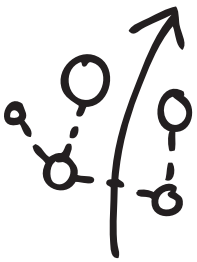
3. People do not feel imposed upon, and yet they honor their commitments.

People do not feel imposed upon by one another in a horizontal organization. This does *not* mean people do whatever they want. Understanding this requires nuance. In some cases authority should be distributed and a group will decide things together, and in other cases the group's interest is best served when someone decides for the group (like when a seaplane pilot tells passengers the safe spots to sit in a plane). For a horizontal mind-set to work, people must honor their commitments, or else they will be im-



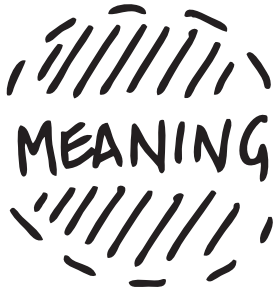
posing on their peers. It is the very empowerment of feeling ownership of the process that inspires people to honor those commitments.

4. Actions are both participatory and responsive.



Horizontal does not mean chaos! Successful non-hierarchical culture is both participatory and responsive. Things get done. We are hardwired to think that opening up processes to a wider group adds time and pain. Of course, if you open up the responsibilities without thoughtful process, things will not get done. Many of us have experienced that. Non-hierarchical ways replace this free-for-all with structures that are proven to manage participatory culture smoothly. As the chain of command is lifted, the hierarchical structures are replaced by lighter, less hierarchical structures: roles with purpose, accountabilities, and metrics that matter; decision-making methods and spaces that are explicit; meetings that are well documented; people who are aware of what everyone else is doing; mechanisms that strengthen relationships, and work through conflicts. With successful self-organization, even when there is a crisis or a stressful deadline, we do not revert back to fear and control. We can instead fall back on the trust we have built with colleagues.

5. The organization is equitable, generative, and fair.



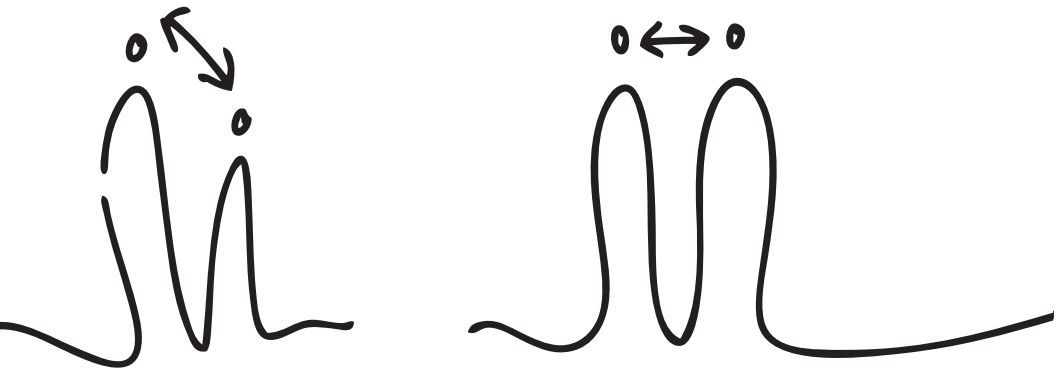
Non-hierarchical organizations are challenged to have a more meaningful purpose and more equitable ways—whether in their salaries, profit sharing, environmental impact, or getting along with others despite differences. These ways are a deliberate step away from extractive, coercive, patriarchal ways. Those are strong words, but they do reflect the paradigms from which our current top-down organizational frameworks and culture have grown. The only way an organization can be fully horizontal is if the organization has meaning for its workers. Then it can easily relinquish control and allow people to own their personal leadership and contribute to the organization.

Getting Unstuck When Going Horizontal

How can you bring about this new way of being without getting frustrated and overwhelmed or without having everything backfire? Moving from aspiration to action is not easy. We carry within us a load of assumptions that support top-down ways and hold us back from developing new behaviors. We are hoping for some easy instruction guide or recipe book, but we know that each organization has its own path to self-management. Some are coming to horizontal ways accidentally, some intentionally, and some begrudgingly. The transition sounds exhausting. Despite genuine and growing

interest in more horizontal ways of working, organizations are getting stuck in making the transition.

Here's an example. A Canadian bank sets up a new initiative: management invites employees who see a process or way of working that doesn't make sense to bring it forward so it can be changed. This initiative sounds great, and the intention is good, but what are the chances it will get stuck? Employees put their requests in the hands of management, who have decision-making and action-taking power—it's the parent-to-child culture at play. If an idea doesn't get enacted, not only will there be no change, but employees will become less engaged, not more. Fully stepping into an adult-to-adult partnership culture is necessary for such a change in process to flourish. Short of working on these fundamental shifts, most change processes will stall.

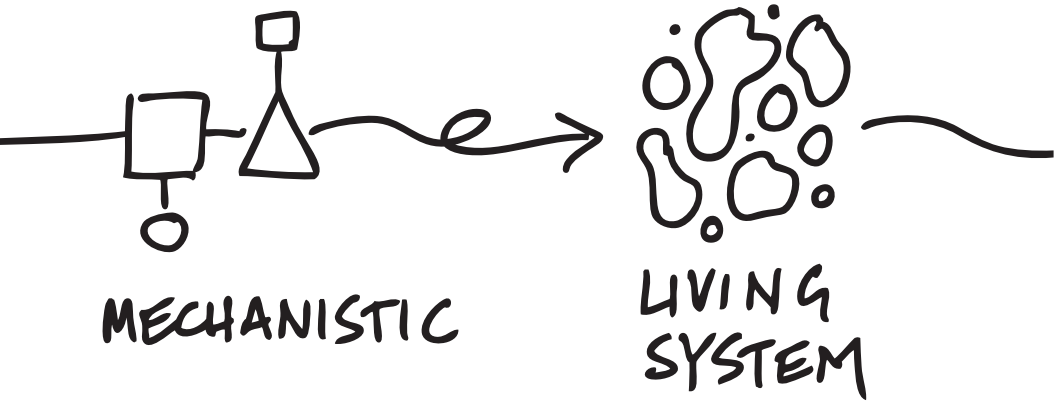


Most people think that when they change to a new system, they need to be good at it from the get-go and have figured out all the details of the journey. The shift is projected to be huge and comprehensive, and this is overwhelming. People also assume that they need to start a revolution with full buy-in from organizational leaders before they are able to do anything. It is no wonder most organizations get stuck!

DON'T DO IT ALL AT ONCE

Whatever happened to just trying things out and learning from them? That is how we all learned to walk and talk. If we are changing to a new system, we need to give ourselves space for errors and learning. Otherwise, what you get is only fair-weather projects. That is, as soon as a situation or challenge arises, and invariably one will, we scapegoat the self-managing initiative and return to conventional ways. We might even go so far as to call it "dogmatic" or "risky" or "inefficient," as though conventional methods are free from dogma, risk, and inefficiency! All the terms we can come up with are shields we build to protect us from changing the paradigm. The reality is that all of us need to learn these horizontal ways and bring them into play within our specific work contexts and domains.

Most organizations have been set up with the goal of making them well-tuned machines that allow them to plan and control into a predictable future. This mind-set is what we call "mechanistic," and it involves employees working individually and in highly specialized roles. Humans in these systems have internalized mechanistic reflexes, and shifting into a horizontal mind-set requires adopting a "living-systems" way of thinking.



Living-systems organizations are like a city where things are in constant flux, ever responding to changes within and around them. Of course, even if we understand and accept this principle, that does not mean that we are able to operationalize it on a daily basis within our work world. The assumptions and structures of most organizations invite us to do just the opposite. There is no magic wand for going horizontal, and there will be bumps in the road. The path forward is through practice.

TWO

PRACTICING IS THE PATH TO MASTERY

But I don't want to go into the water;
I only want to learn how to swim.

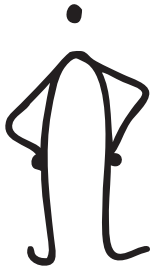
Develop a Horizontal Mind-Set through Practice, Now

Going horizontal is *not* about flipping a switch. It is a deeper, internal shift, with new behaviors and reflexes. This can take time to develop, and anyone can strengthen and grow their non-hierarchical mind-set at any time. What do I mean when I say horizontal ways are a "practice"? Practice means the learning requires constant repetition. It is doing the same thing over and over, adjusting and tweaking each time. It is a learning-in-action process.

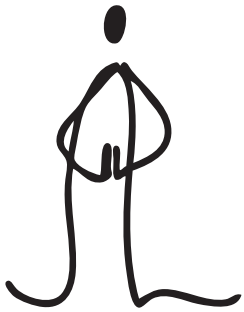
Some people think they need to have the buy-in of their organizational decision makers to be able to start implementing non-hierarchical ways. Incorrect! Here are four reasons

to start developing this horizontal mind-set through non-hierarchical practices now:

1. **The whole idea of non-hierarchical ways is to own your personal leadership.** Therefore, we cannot just wait for the hierarchy to usher it in. If horizontal ways are important to us, then it is time to pull up our sleeves and step into action. We cannot wait for the hierarchy to initiate a shift to non-hierarchy.



2. **Much of the work of shifting to a non-hierarchical mind-set is internal.** Hence, anyone can begin at any time. In fact, the person who stands to benefit the most by engaging in these horizontal practices is you. It is really about becoming aware of the habits and reflexes that you carry within yourself from hierarchical command and control culture and replacing them with new habits and reflexes. Not only do the practices help all of us become better workers, but they help us become better humans (partners, parents, friends, citizens).



3. **You don't really know the future.** Your organization and your place of work might change in ways that you can't foresee. If you start horizontal practices, you can never really know how the ripples will affect those around you. You can invest in expanding your range of ways of being with other people and doing work without being attached to where it will go. When a time comes that your organization shifts to more horizontal ways, your awareness and skills in the new habits will be a gift and an advantage.

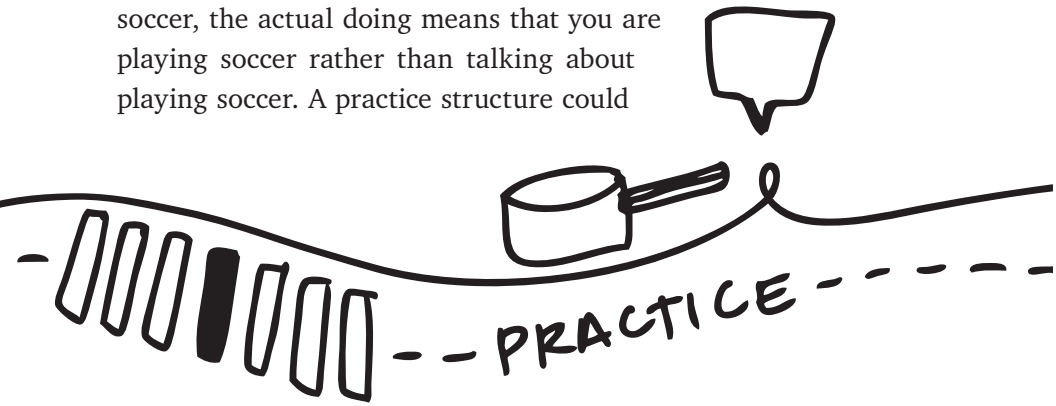
4. **Sometimes people focus on non-hierarchical structural and policy shifts that have more immediate visibility.** These shifts are important, don't get me wrong, but without non-hierarchical practices in place they will flounder. Structures alone do not mean that people will reconnect with their natural self-organizing instincts to function with trust, mutual care, and initiative taking. Practices help navigate the deep cultural shift.

What Defines a Practice?

Practice, that is, doing something over and over and over to facilitate mastery, is perfectly natural for humans in every culture. Through practice we learn to speak a language, drive a car, play an instrument, hunt for quarry, cook a meal, converse with others. You name the skill, we all know that if we give time to deliberate practice, we get better at it. With a martial art, for example, we do the moves over and over to strengthen the muscles, create new automatic reflexes within us, feel when the moves are right and when they are aligned. We practice together to get the feedback offered by the presence of others. We can both challenge and support one another in our practices.

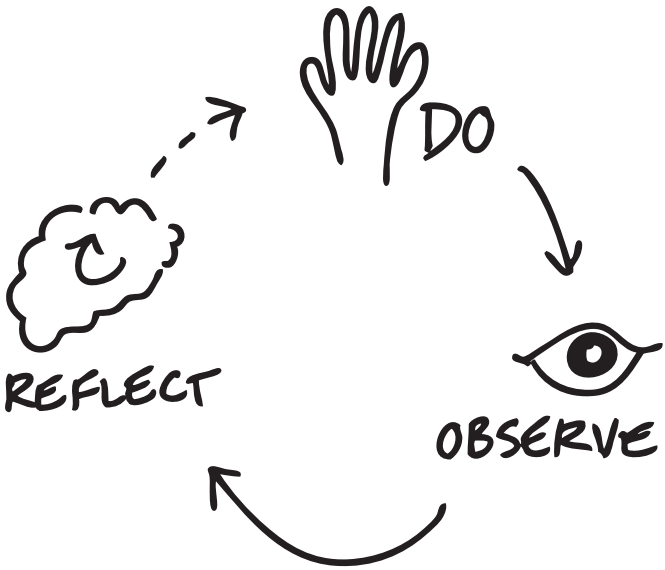
Practice does not by any means take the form of a free-for-all. We get masterful at performing judo not just by putting in hundreds of random hours but by giving ourselves methods and frameworks, and by reflecting on how well we are doing, what is holding us back, and where we want to grow.

This self-reflection invites a deeper analysis of our personal assumptions and beliefs that might need to shift. Whenever I refer to the term *practice*, I am including these three components: (1) the actual doing, (2) some principles or processes that provide a minimal structure to hold the practice, and (3) self-reflection. For example in soccer, the actual doing means that you are playing soccer rather than talking about playing soccer. A practice structure could



be taking 20 penalty shots in a row where you focus on hitting different precise spots in the goal. Self-reflection could be analyzing from the 20 penalty shots where your strengths and weaknesses lie to give yourself further targeted practice. This sequence is sometimes referred to as a do–observe–reflect loop to help shift and grow new habits and skills. Practices don't happen by osmosis. We need to intentionally and actively initiate new behaviors.

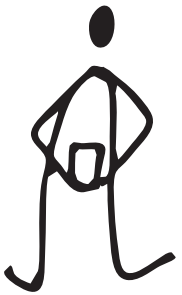
Somewhere the notion of practice got mixed up with the notion of expertise. Thinking in terms of expertise can make us feel incompetent or no longer in need of more learning. By contrast, practice accepts us exactly where we are. Practice is kind. Practice invites us into our doubt and discomfort, into the messy imperfection so we can grow. Practice says just try; that's how we learn. It's a never-ending path of doing, tweaking, and doing again.



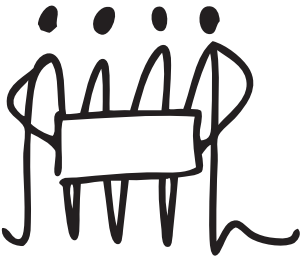
Three Types of Practice

The practices in this book fall into three categories or types. I have created the categories as a way to help you be more conscious and strategic with your practices. Note that it is important that you find spaces to practice that have psychological safety and where you will not risk your job or your professional reputation. Intentionally choosing which type of practice is appropriate for any given situation will help you grow your horizontal culture one step at a time, and help you avoid getting stuck.

1. **Personal practices.** Personal practices don't require any formal permission or agreement with others to try out. They are individual practices that might not even be noticed by others, while still holding power and potential for transformation. They have a power to model a way forward for oneself and others. The practitioner benefits enormously by implementing a personal practice because these practices help us with our inner work. They help us be more self-aware about subtleties. Personal practices can be done internally anywhere, no matter what the external context is. They can benefit us in all aspects of our lives, in work and beyond work. Examples might be asking for help, listening in a deep way, and getting grounded.



2. **Safe practices.** Some practices require the involvement and consent of other people; they have a collective element to them. Safe practices are those where we can engage these exterior forces in contexts that offer care and kindness for us. These are practices we do with colleagues whom we trust. They allow us to flex our muscles on practices outside of the work world, with friends or in our community groups and clubs. With a bit of practice, they can be brought to the next level. Examples might be collective decision making, collective sensemaking, and team meeting practices.



3. **Trial practices.** Trial practices are those that can be proposed to a group. It is important that they be proposed as prototypes. That is, try them multiple times in order to gather learnings and insights about how to work better together. These are the practices that can help shift an entire organizational culture and structure.

I highly suggest that you begin with the first two practice types before stepping into the third. In the beginning you will have enough work to do to shed a hierarchical mind-set and step more fully into a non-hierarchical mind-set.

Practices Are for Everyone, No Matter Your Role

The seven domains of practices we delve into in this book are pervasive across all organizations. They all begin at an individual level, and they grow from there. They help us show up differently in our organizations, but they are nothing strange or foreign. On the contrary, these are ways that are deeply familiar to us because we already practice them in our personal lives. We are just bringing them into our work worlds, with adjustments for the context of work. These are the practices:

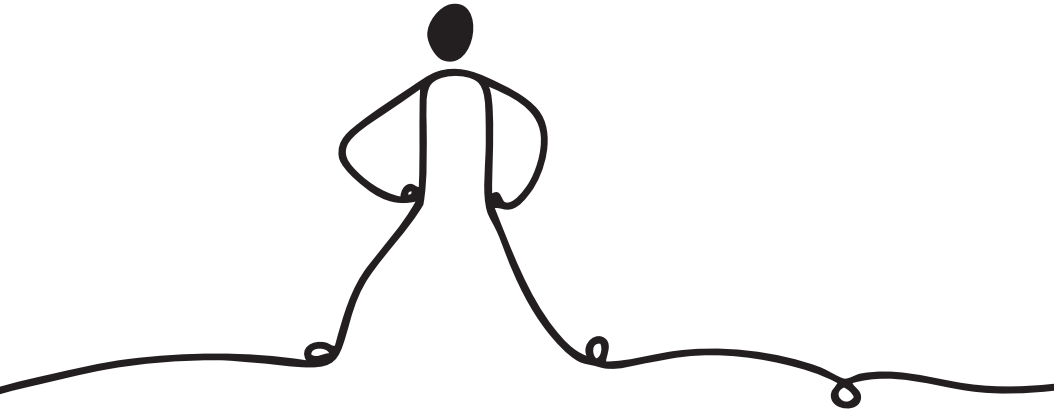
1. **Autonomy:** Figuring out what we want to be doing or need to be doing
2. **Purpose:** Keeping purpose rather than our egos at the heart of what we're doing
3. **Meetings:** Conducting our meetings collaboratively
4. **Transparency:** Sharing with one another and trusting one another
5. **Decision Making:** Making decisions where others' voices are heard and action is the focus
6. **Learning and Development:** Growing and developing ourselves beyond our current assumptions and limitations
7. **Relationships and Conflicts:** Nurturing relationships with our fellow human beings

With repetition self-organization will begin to feel like the normal and healthy way for an organization to function.

We All Start in Different Places

If you are a manager, your challenge might be to create spaces to allow others to initiate their personal leadership. You have influence, sometimes more than you realize. If people are accustomed to you calling the shots, you will need to create the void that others can occupy and support others who are activating their personal leadership. A question to keep in mind is "How can my vision, skills, and strategy be leveraged for the organization while inviting others into theirs?" As a manager you might also be in a position to protect a space for those below you to experiment with non-hierarchical practices.

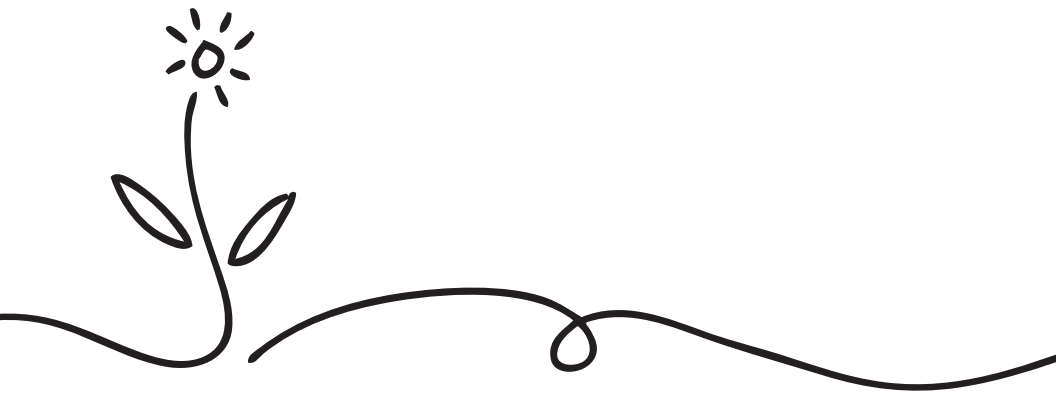
If you are not in a management position, your challenge might be in stepping up. You might be accustomed to waiting for others to act on your behalf, whereas there are in fact many small practices that you can enter into that can grow horizontal ways. Taking up these practices will require stepping out of your comfort zone: speaking up, making proposals, taking action where you are. You will need to navigate the power structures of your organization with care and courage, and sometimes you will need to assess when it is time to let go as well. You will be in a completely different frame of mind when you are in a non-hierarchical mind-set. It means that if you notice something that needs to be done, you figure out an action or proposal to move it forward or you let it go. You will begin to become aware of the permission culture that's part of your mind-set, and you will step away from that and further into your personal leadership.



Straddling Two Paradigms

Each and every one of us is probably already engaged in various non-hierarchical practices within our families and communities as well as our work worlds without even realizing it. After all, self-organization is part of human nature. Much of what you will discover in this book will feel familiar because we are just bringing these normal ways of being into our work worlds (with adjustment for the context of work). These are practices that have gotten a little lost in the organizational culture and structures that we have created for ourselves, but they are practices that we can rekindle and grow while we continue to do business. It is a bit like building a bicycle as we cycle on it, so it will be a bit messy, and that is okay!

You will likely find yourself in situations where you need to straddle both vertical and horizontal practices for a while. Your two worlds are co-existing. Breathe and accept it. A fundamental shift like this requires a foot in two worlds.

By taking up non-hierarchical practices at work, you will be able to see and acknowledge them elsewhere in your life and grow them further. You might notice non-hierarchical ways being used in a professional community or an informal group you are part of. One practice space can feed another. Since you expect and desire non-hierarchical ways in the in-

formal spaces in your life, your non-hierarchical practice can grow there too.[11] As you begin to bring a horizontal lens to the different situations in your life, your opportunities for practice will grow. The more your personal practices strengthen and grow, the more you will feel able to propose practices to others in your workplace. Then you will begin connecting with existing practices around you and helping expand them. Like a plant that receives water and sunlight, the practices will grow and grow. Slowly but surely, successful horizontal practices will shine the way to your organization's future.