

Blinkracy



A light version of Holacracy[®] to make any company management-free and 100% results-oriented

Content

1 FROM COAL MINES TO CUBICLES
Why Organizations Need to
Change the Way They Tick

2 THE PIECES OF THE PUZZLE
Holacracy's Key Elements

3 LET'S GET SERIOUS
The Step-by-Step Guide

4 WHAT TO EXPECT
Effects After the First Months

Appendix

FROM COAL MINES TO CUBICLES

Why Organizations Need to Change the Way They Tick

You probably hate your job.

This is not an exaggeration: a recent poll showed that 71% of American employees dislike what they do for a living. In other words, most of us spend the majority of our productive years doing something we despise. But why is this?

Unfortunately, most companies are still stuck in a mindset that originated way back in the **Industrial Revolution**. This was a time when our ancestors worked 14-hour days in coal mines and textile mills, rarely even seeing sunlight during their adult lives.

Back then, organizations were typified by characteristics like:

- A strict **command hierarchy** where decisions were always made at the top and implemented at the bottom.
- A large army of uneducated minions who performed **mindless work** like swinging a pickaxe or operating a mechanical loom, with middle managers barking orders at them.
- A thoroughly **unpleasant organizational culture** for all involved, except maybe the cigar-smoking, top hat-wearing, monocle-wiping owner at the top of the hierarchy.

These principles were the basis for a management system known as *command and control*. And unfortunately, most companies still adhere to it.

The problem is that command and control only makes sense if the person running the show is an acknowledged genius, and all the employees are robots incapable of making decisions on their own.

These days though, organizations tend not to be this stratified: smart, educated people can be found at all levels of a company, and as you've probably already realized if you've ever held a job, a senior position is no guarantee of intelligence.

So what do you think happens when you try to force people of equal intelligence into a strict hierarchy as per the command and control system?

71% wind up hating their jobs, that's what.



In addition to damaging employee morale, the old command and control system has one other major problem: it's a massive competitive disadvantage.

First of all, command and control is far too stiff and unresponsive for today's hectic business environment.

Back in the days of the Industrial Revolution, doing business was pretty predictable: the world's demand for coal or linen wouldn't plummet or sky-rocket overnight, so it was possible and sensible to plan well ahead and then stick to that plan. Top executives could occupy themselves with plotting the road ahead while their employees would do the manual work.

Today, the world is different: companies find themselves in ever-changing environments where new technologies, competitors and opportunities spring up all the time.

Businesses that fail to respond to these changes collapse unceremoniously: just look at the example of photographic film giant Eastman Kodak. In the late 1990s the company was so stuck in its film-photography mindset that it completely failed to spot the increasing trend toward digital photography. As a result, it went from being the dominant player in the industry to filing for bankruptcy in 2012.

And this is not a unique instance of a company falling victim to change: a Yale University study showed that in the past century the average lifespan of leading US companies has decreased from 67 years to just 15. In this new, turbulent world, businesses need agile decision making that help them adapt to changes. And this is where command and control systems fall short.

Average Lifetime of S&P 500 Companies



Source
Richard Foster:
Creative Destruction(2001);
Deloitte Center for the Edge

A second reason why command and control should be relegated to the museum is that it usually comes with heavy baggage, namely *office politics*. Yes, there's a personal level in the inner workings of every organization, and in a command and control system, it can derail the entire purpose of the company.

For example, have you ever heard of someone at work getting a promotion not because they're the most competent person for the job, but because they're on the best terms with the boss?

In command and control systems, managers and supervisors wield far too much power compared to employees. They are near despots who can hire, fire and promote people based on whims, not on merit.

And what's the result of this dictatorship? Not only do companies end up with sub-par managers due to unfair promotions, but the rest of the team becomes thoroughly demotivated as well. They see that recognition has nothing to do with merit, and so they start to wonder why they should keep working hard, when that time would probably be better spent kissing up to the boss.



These two aspects of command and control – its lack of agility and encouragement of office politics – are what make it obsolete. But the good news is that there's an alternative.

Just imagine, wouldn't it be great if companies weren't so slow and cumbersome, but rather nimble and adaptive, responding aptly to opportunities and threats around them? If say Kodak Eastman were such a company, it might have spotted the digital photography wave on the horizon and ridden it to success instead of being crushed under it.

And wouldn't it be great if work wasn't about politics, egos and kissing up to the right people, but rather about *getting the job done*? If promotions weren't handed down by an omnipotent boss, but rather work assignments were decided together, fairly, within the team based on who's the best fit?

If you find yourself nodding vigorously, then you've just discovered the basis for *Holacracy*: a new management system that is to command and control what the Ford Model T was to the horse-drawn carriage!

To find out how it works, read on – your organization may never be the same again.

THE PIECES OF THE PUZZLE

Holacracy's Key Elements

Holacracy was originally developed by [Brian Robertson](#) in 2007. Since then this spark of an idea has spread like wildfire, having been adopted by many startups and even some larger [companies like Zappos](#).

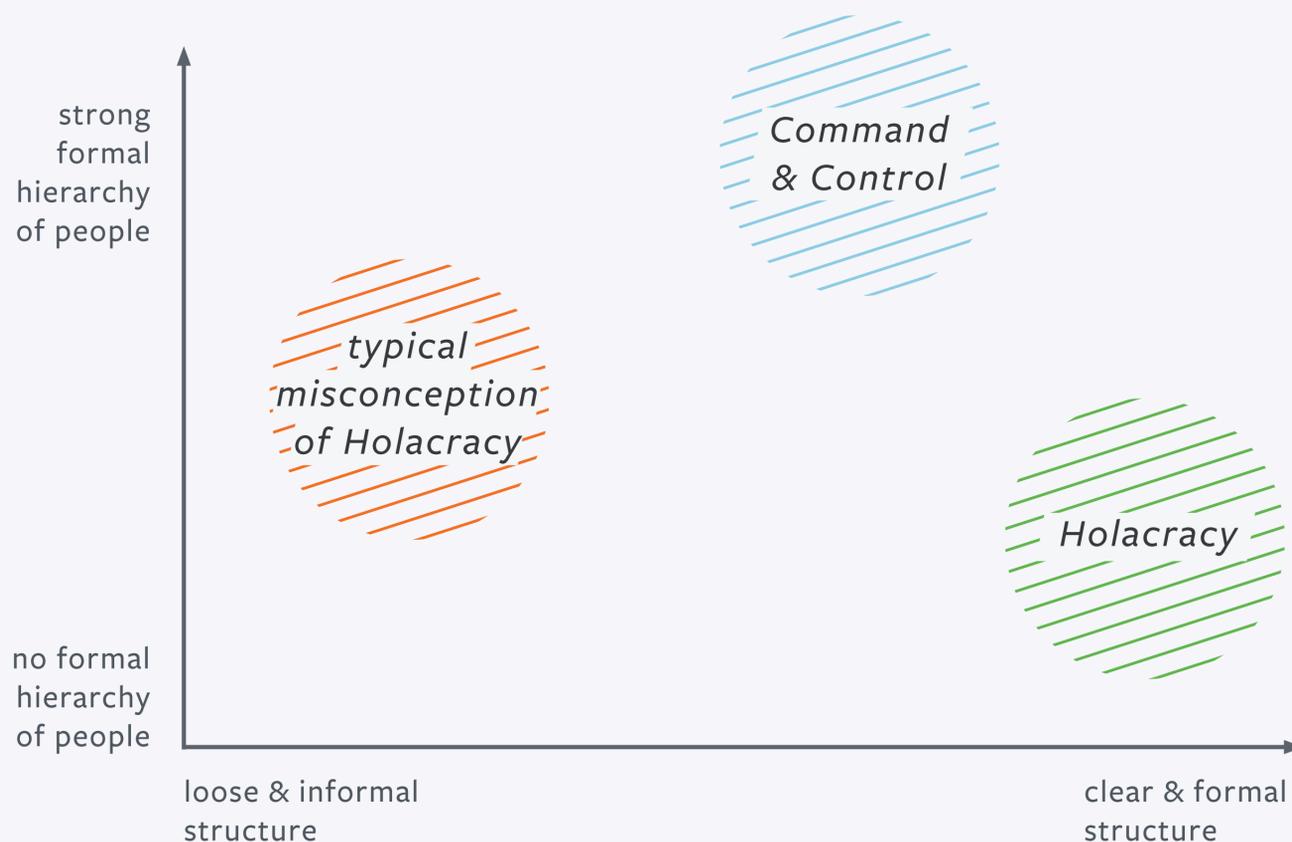
Though it's a complicated concept, its main idea is simple: eliminate all hierarchies and job titles in organizations, and replace them with a formal structure that is fully focused on getting the job done.

The latter part is important: Holacracy does not eliminate hierarchies and then replace them with loose, disorganized anarchy. Rather, it introduces a strict and comprehensive set of rules that enable everybody, regardless of seniority, to make quick, smart decisions that are in line with the organization's goals.

In its [full form](#), Holacracy is a complex and sophisticated set of rules guiding organizational conduct. Adopting it requires companies to change their meeting practices very profoundly, so a significant amount of training is needed to teach everyone the new rules of the game. This is why implementing full Holacracy is not realistic for many companies.

At [Blinkist](#), we too were initially sceptical of making this leap, so we developed our own, "lighter" version of Holacracy, which worked surprisingly well for us. In the next few pages, you'll find brief descriptions of the key changes we made.

Holacracy vs. Command & Control



1 *Forget about titles, embrace roles!*

In traditional command and control systems, people place great emphasis on job titles like *Sales Manager* or *HR Assistant*.

In Holacracy, such titles lose their meaning.

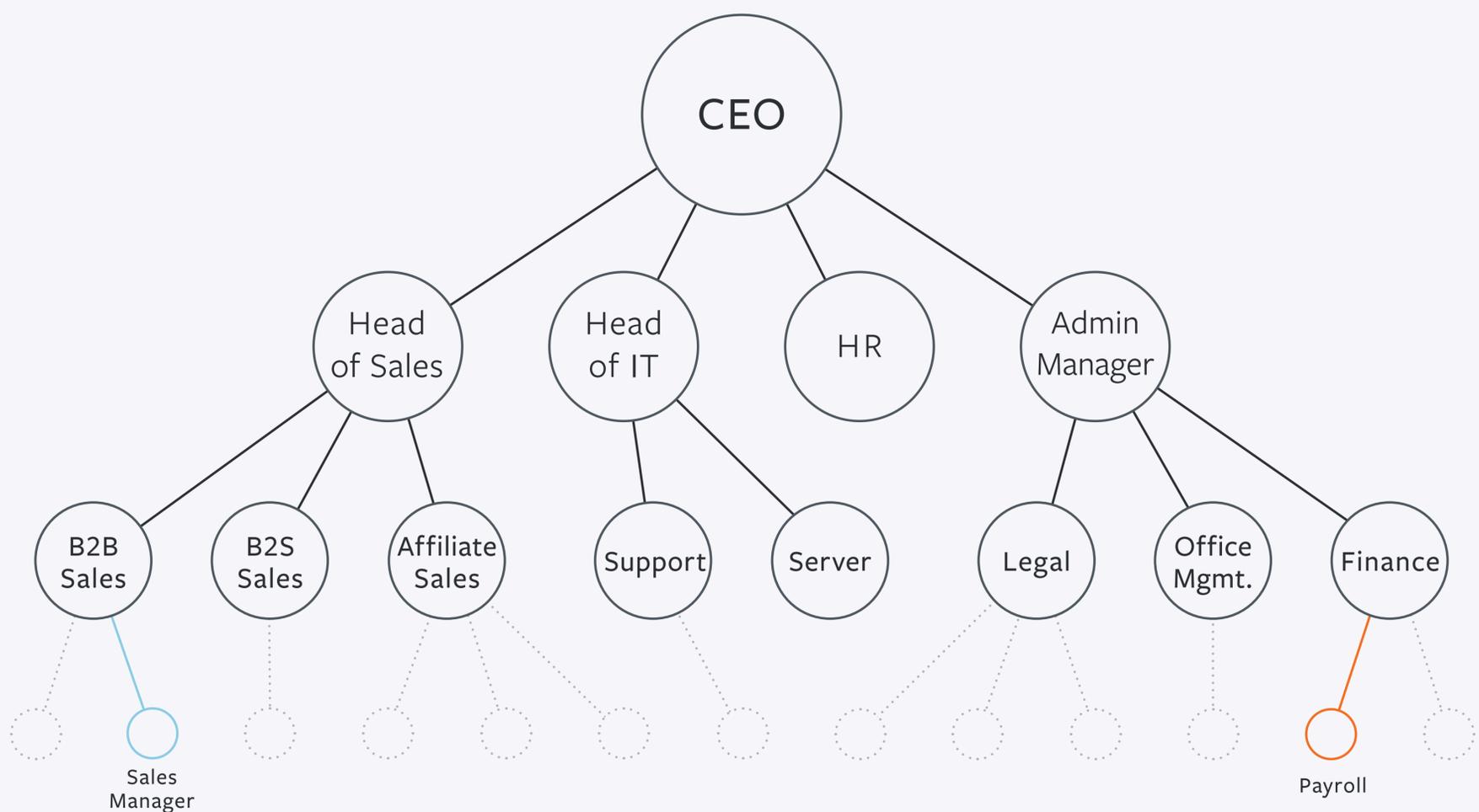
What matter instead are *roles*.

Typically a command and control organization uses a *top-down approach* in allocating work: it defines a title for an individual, like *Sales Manager*, and then based on that tries to figure out what kind of tasks the person should undertake.

With roles, this process is reversed: the first step is to lay out all the actions that need to be taken for the company to succeed. These are described as *accountabilities*. Roles are then created by creating clusters of these accountabilities.

When all the roles are summed up, no accountabilities should be left over. In other words, someone is accountable for every single action needed for the company to be successful. This applies to high-level accountabilities like determining the company's vision as well as to minor details like ensuring there's always coffee at the office so the tech team doesn't go into a caffeine withdrawal-coma.

Command & Control



So what's the benefit of thinking in roles rather than job titles?

- 1 For starters, the very process of defining roles makes the expectations and responsibilities of each role crystal-clear. This is often neglected in title-oriented command and control organizations, resulting in conflicts and frustration as managers and employees form their own implicit expectations that rarely coincide.
- 2 It enables individuals to hold multiple roles. In a Holacracy, one person could well take on both the role "B2B sales" as well as "Payroll," if that person has the skills and resources to do so. Traditional organizations on the other hand would need two separate people for this.

3 And finally, roles allow people to discuss issues dispassionately by creating distance between the individual and her work. Someone saying “The B2B role is not being fulfilled” sounds much less personal and abrasive than “The Sales Manager is not doing her job.” This distance helps people be constructive and not take criticism personally.

Clustering Accountabilities into Roles

What needs to get done:

- managing investor relations
- cold-calling potential customers
- recruiting new employees
- maintaining a customer database
- setting up meetings with prospective customers
- designing user experience
- negotiating and closing deals
- calculating monthly salaries of each employee
- making salary payments
- reporting monthly salary payments to accounting
- organizing weekly team meetings

Roles needed:

B2B Sales

- cold-calling potential customers
- maintaining a customer database
- setting up meetings with prospective customers
- negotiating and closing deals

Payroll

- calculating monthly salaries of each employee
- making salary payments
- reporting monthly salary payments to accounting

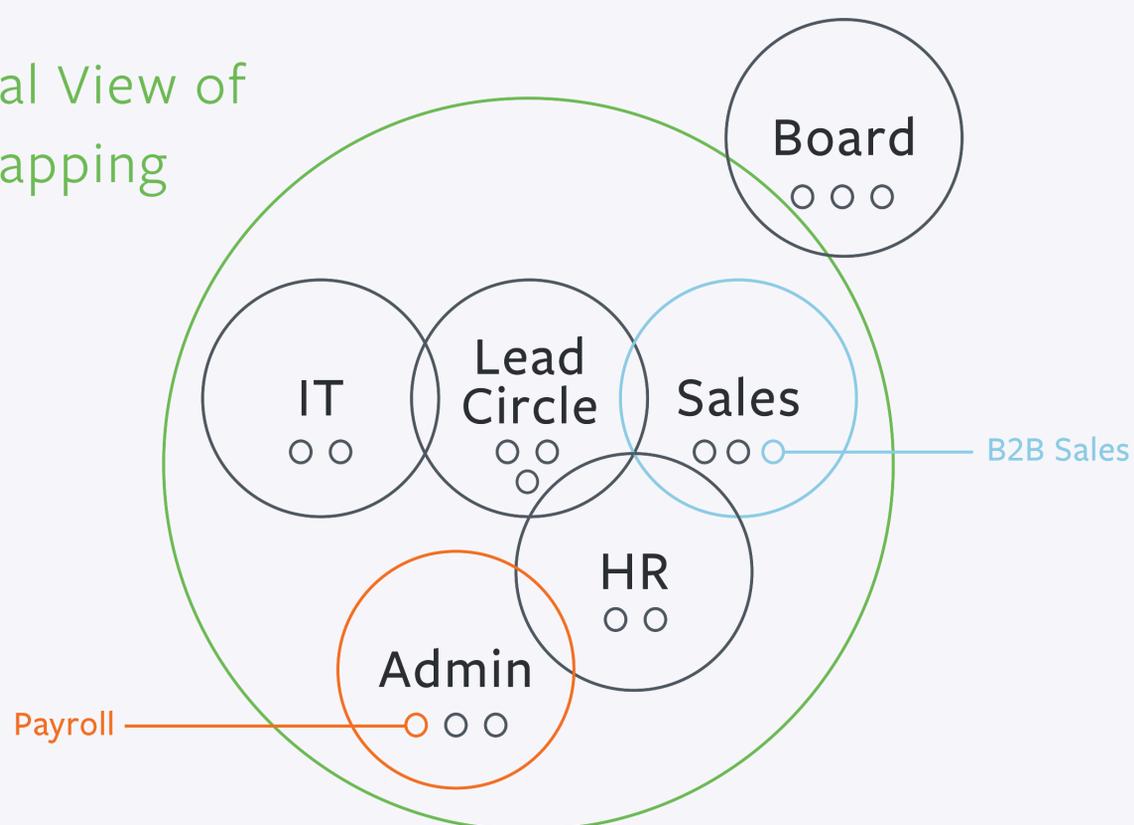
2 *Departments are so 1984,
circles are the new black.*

Another tenet of Holacracy is that instead of departments and divisions, companies are made up of circles. In fact, this leads us to the origins of the word Holacracy: “*holon*” is a Greek word denoting an independent and fully-functioning unit that’s also part of a larger entity. In Holacracy, circles are holons.

At first glance, a circle is basically a team comprising different roles. The key difference to traditional departments is that circles are very **flexible**:

An example of a circle could be Marketing and Sales, comprising sales-related roles like B2B Sales and B2C Sales. But the circle may well also include less obvious roles like Customer Service, because customer feedback plays a key part in marketing. In traditional organizations, the customer service representatives would probably reside in a completely different department, from where they could not properly contribute. Also, one role can be present in multiple circles, so the Customer Service role could well take part in the Product Development circle as well, relating customer feedback to engineers and designers.

Organizational View of Circles Overlapping



Just like a department, each circle has a clear purpose: a topic vital for the company's success which the members of the circle work together to pursue.

So the Marketing and Sales circle could have the purpose of "increasing sales by 20 percent each year."

However, unlike with traditional departments, this purpose can be easily changed if it no longer reflects the company's strategy. Even radical change can take place in a single meeting.

If for example the new company focus is creating brand awareness rather than driving sales, the circle might change its purpose to "increase traffic to website by 50% each year."

Unlike departments, new circles can also be set up or shut down very quickly. So if the company decides to narrow its product portfolio, the circles dedicated to the “dead” products will simply be disbanded, while the people involved will continue in their roles in other circles. And if the company starts a new initiative to e.g. revise its branding, a new circle can be set up and the relevant roles invited to participate, all in the space of a day.

Shutting down or setting up departments in this manner would take weeks, and probably result in layoffs or at the very least, some badly bruised egos. But with circles, this is seen as something natural and impersonal, so no-one frets about it.

There is only one permanent, unchanging circle: the *lead circle*, which is responsible for the firm’s overall vision and strategy. Ideally, at least one member of the lead circle should be present in all other circles, so that everyone’s voice is heard, but of course in larger companies this may not be possible.

3 *Meetings are dead, long live meetings!*

Holacracy also has some clear guidelines for dealing with meetings. This is important because in traditional command and control organizations, unfocused, pointless meetings can be a serious drain on productivity. Typically, one of the most frustrating issues is that there’s no discipline: every topic is discussed, from high-flying company strategy to minute technical details that are only of interest to two people in the room. Holacracy addresses this by instituting clear types of meetings, each with its own scope and purpose, where digression is strictly forbidden.

Tacticals

The first main type of meeting is known as the *weekly tactical*. It's a short, focused session that every circle starts their work week with. There, the circle aligns on how to accomplish their goals for the week and to clear any roadblocks.

For example, in the Sales and Marketing circle's tactical, the B2B Sales role may bring up a roadblock that is keeping her from fulfilling her accountabilities: she needs to cold call customers, but has not yet received the new product specifications necessary for this.

In a command and control organization, this kind of issue could spawn a 15-minute discussion about the necessity of cold calls, whether existing customers should be approached instead and the gripping tale of someone's auntie once buying something from a telephone salesperson. But in a Holacracy, these meetings are known as *tacticals* for a reason: they are purely focused on *how* to get work done, not on *what* exactly to do. This helps keep the meetings brief and efficient. In fact, no issue should be discussed for more than a few minutes, and no discussion of higher level issues like strategy, let alone aunties, is permitted. The focus is clearing any roadblocks hindering progress for that week.

In the example of the missing product specifications, if no-one in the Sales and Marketing circle can immediately resolve the issue, then this topic is pushed into another, separate meeting that the B2S Sales role will have to set up with someone in the Product circle. This avoids other people in the Sales and Marketing circle having to waste time discussing a problem they can't help solve.

Issue-specific meetings

This brings us to the second important type of meeting in a Holacracy: *issue-specific meetings*. These are set up on a case-by-case basis to resolve issues that cannot be tackled in the tacticals. In issue-specific meetings,

the goal is simply to resolve the issue in question with the minimum number of participants possible. In the case of the missing product specifications, the *B2S Sales* role would set up a meeting with say, the *Lead Product Engineer* role in order to get the specifications. If she finds out that the delayed product specifications are a recurring issue, she would then have to escalate it and bring it to governance meeting of the *Marketing and Sales* circle.

Governance meetings

In addition to the weekly tacticals, every circle, including the company's lead circle, should have regular *governance* meetings every 1-3 months, depending on how quickly the company's situation changes.

These meetings are there to accommodate the kind of higher-level discussion that is banned at tacticals. In governance meetings, circles review and revise their purpose, as well as the roles and accountabilities needed to attain that purpose. Limiting the discussion in this way allows participants to stay focused on the big picture, without worrying about the nitty-gritty details.

Governance meetings are also the right place to bring up *tensions*. What does this mean? Say someone has encountered a problem that is keeping them from fulfilling their accountabilities. That's a tension. Or say someone spots an opportunity for the circle to better pursue its purpose. That's also a tension. These kind of tensions can be discussed in governance meetings, and based on them, new projects, roles or accountabilities may be created.

In our example of the missing product specifications, the B2B Sales role might bring up the tension that waiting for the Product circle to deliver the specifications is holding her back. Someone else might then suggest that she start attending the Product circle's tacticals so she has more visibility into their activities. If everyone agrees, this would then be added to her accountabilities.

Company-wide touch points

In our light version of Holacracy, there's also a fourth main type of meeting: the *company-wide touch point*. This is a weekly meeting where everyone in the company sits down for an hour or less. Each circle will give a two-minute update on their progress in the previous week, after which an open agenda is created and discussed. The purpose is twofold: First, it helps people stay up to date on what everyone else is working on. Second, it allows anyone and everyone to seek input from the entire team on issues they have on their mind.

For example, a data analyst may be struggling with an anomaly in the customer data and can bring it up as an agenda point. Everyone who has critical information for the matter can then speak up to help clarify the issue. Through this discussion, it may well emerge that the IT team changed something in the database the previous week, which is causing the anomaly, and thus the analyst has resolved her issue in mere minutes.

Typically in command and control organizations, the various departments are basically silos, with very little visibility into what's going on in the rest of the company. This creates misunderstandings and confusion:

The marketing department may be hard at work developing a marketing campaign for a hot new product like, say, champagne, whereas the product department actually abandoned champagne ages ago because it was too complicated and is now focused on developing a nice red wine. Clearly, at least one department's work is going to waste.

What's more, these silos make it very difficult for anyone to quickly resolve inter-departmental issues, like the database bug, because it's near-impossible to get the attention of everyone in the company. Instead, our poor data analyst would need to contact her supervisor, who would have to contact other departmental supervisors, who would all probably claim it's someone else's fault, and it could take days to track down the issue.

4 *Managers, begone!*

Holacracy's projects and recurring tasks manage themselves.

In a command and control organization, employees typically think of work as a continuous stream of tasks handed down to them by managers. Whether it's doing an annual budget review or writing copy for a new marketing campaign, it all seems the same: execution of a given task.

In Holacracy, this drudgery is broken up into a far more sensible division: each circle's work is divided into *recurring tasks* and *projects*.

Recurring tasks are the routine, business-as-usual actions that the circle needs to perform every week. In the *Sales and Marketing* circle, for example, a routine task could be reviewing the sales figures for the previous week.

Such tasks are consolidated into a **checklist**, which is run through at the beginning of each tactical to ensure they are all taken care of. They are not discussed unless there's a problem with them.

In addition to these tasks, each circle also has on-going *projects*: larger undertakings that are meant to help the circle pursue its purpose. Each project is defined by a specific desired outcome, and when it is achieved, the project is finished.

For example, in the Sales and Marketing circle, one project might be to "set up a professional CRM database." Every week in the tactical, the status of each project is reviewed, and clear, concrete next actions are defined. So in the CRM database project, next actions for the first week could be to "research best practices and find software alternatives."

Actions that need to be done but won't be pursued during the current week are added to a *backlog*, from which they will be elevated into next actions at some later stage.

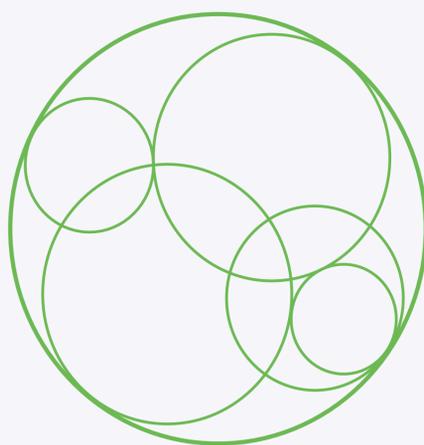
And what does this accomplish?

First, it ensures that the circles do not devote undue amounts of meeting time to routine recurring tasks unless there's a problem with them. Instead, it forces them to focus on constant improvement and innovation through projects, an aspect that's often neglected in command and control organizations.

Second and more importantly, it makes managers obsolete. In traditional command and control organizations, most activity grinds to a halt in the absence of a clear management figure. But in Holacracy, no-one needs to tell the circles what to do, since they just keep doing what they would usually:

- 1 Ensure recurring actions are all checked off.
- 2 Execute and create next actions for projects.
- 3 Define and launch new projects as needed.

So now you know the basic principles of our light version of Holacracy. Though they may seem restrictive at first, we're convinced that they are the staples of the future of running organizations. Next, you'll find a step-by-step guide that will help you implement our light version of Holacracy in your organization.



LET'S GET SERIOUS

The Step-by-Step Guide

Now that you've seen what Holacracy looks like in theory, it's time to get your hands dirty. What follows is a step-by-step guide for implementing our light version of Holacracy in any company. No matter whether you're a startup founder, corporate executive or a regular employee who feels the organization could use a shake-up, feel free to use this template to both propose the change and guide everyone through it.

I Define your corporate strategy

If you don't know where you're going, Holacracy can't help take you there. This is why it's crucial that before you do anything, your executive team agrees on the company's strategy for at least the next quarter. This is the only way your circles will be able to define their purposes and decide what kind of projects to pursue. Once Holacracy is up and running, revising this strategy will be a task for the lead circle.

At Blinkist, our corporate strategy is revised every quarter, after which existing circles align to it, obsolete circles are shut down and new ones are launched as required.

II Find your guinea pig

Typically, when you start talking about implementing Holacracy in a management meeting, you'll encounter a lot of resistance and scepticism. After all, you're talking about a radical transformation. So how can you get around this?

Instead of trying to change the whole company at once, you can suggest a limited experiment with just one team in the company. This will allay the fears while still giving you the chance to show what Holacracy can do.

For this experiment, you need a guinea pig. Ideally, it should be a team that's fairly independent, with responsibilities that are even somewhat isolated from the rest of the company. This will allow other teams to continue business as usual while the experiment is running.

III Introduce the guinea pig team to the experiment

Explain to them that you would like to try out a new, non-hierarchical, flexible system of governing their work, and that they've been chosen because you have confidence in their ability to make such a change. Also, be sure to highlight the benefits that this change is expected to bring about, such as the ability to work on interesting projects of their own choosing as well as having to spend less time in pointless meetings. This alone should whet everyone's appetite for the change. Also, be sure to share some materials on Holacracy with the team beforehand - this eBook might be a good place to start!

At Blinkist, our chosen guinea pig was the Content Team, responsible for the production of content for our app.

IV Have your first governance meeting

This is where the bulk of the work will occur, which is why you should book at least four hours for it. Don't worry, you'll pat yourself on the back later for taking the time to do this properly, and meetings after this will be far shorter.

So what should you do in this first meeting? This is where things get a little complicated, which is why it's essential you follow the steps below closely:

- 1 To get started, you need to choose a tool to document the circle's purpose, roles, projects, next actions and so forth. There are many options for this, but our choice was the team collaboration software [Asana](#), which allows you to easily assign and track tasks among team members. You can of course also opt for pen and paper, but we've found it's far better to use an online tool that's always accessible to everyone.
- 2 Next, you need to choose two key people for the meeting: the *Facilitator* and the *Secretary*. The Facilitator is basically the chairperson of the meeting, bringing up points to be discussed and ensuring the conversation does not veer off topic. At least for the first few months, you as the primary Holacracy-advocate should take on this role. Note though that this person is not in charge, their task is merely to ensure the meetings go smoothly. The Secretary on the other hand is decided on an ad hoc basis for each meeting, and their task is to take notes on the meeting and share them with the rest of the group afterwards. This ensures meetings are always fully-documented, so that no tasks slip under the radar.

- 3 You can now turn the team’s attention to the first point in the governance agenda: they are no longer a team, but a circle. And every circle needs a purpose that’s aligned with the company’s overall strategy. Open the floor for discussion about what your circle’s purpose really is, with the goal of ending up with a single sentence that everyone is happy with. At Blinkist, the content circle ended up with:

“Create and promote innovative, great content that our customers will value.”

- 4 Next, it’s time to list all the accountabilities in the circle, meaning the concrete actions that need to take place for that purpose to be achieved. It’s important to arrive at a comprehensive list, so feel free to spend a lot of time on this.

At Blinkist, we came up with around 50 accountabilities, ranging from “Scheduling publication of content” to “Recruiting new content contributors.”

- 5 Once a comprehensive list has been compiled, the accountabilities need to be clustered together into roles. This is usually fairly straight-forward: pick the low-hanging fruit first by putting together accountabilities that obviously belong together, and then try to find places for the oddballs.

At Blinkist’s content team, the 50 accountabilities were distributed over six roles, such as “Recruiting and HR” and “Content selection and publication.”

- 6 Decide on who in the circle will take on each role. This does not mean that the person has to perform every task related to that role, merely that they take responsibility for those tasks getting done. In other words, they can request support from the rest of the team as needed, and are expected to alert the others when they encounter roadblocks or problems.

- 7 Now that the roles are clear, you can move on to determining the actions that the circle will work on. Start with the projects. Each project should have a concrete goal that improves the current status quo, and when that goal is reached the project is marked as completed. The tasks necessary to complete a project are listed and marked either as *next actions*, meaning they will be completed during the next week or as *backlog*, meaning they need to be completed at some stage, but can't be tackled quite yet.

At Blinkist, we wound up with projects like “Grow content production to 12 publications per week” and “Recruit content contributors for next year.” An example of a next action in the former was “Assess current production capacity.”

- 8 Next, it's time to look at the *recurring actions*. These are the business-as-usual tasks that need to be done week after week. Instead of clogging up the projects with these as next actions that never disappear, you should instead put these into one long *checklist*. This allows you to go through them quickly in every weekly meeting without devoting time to discussion, while still alerting you to any problems in these routine tasks.

At Blinkist, we have items on our checklist like “Content for next week ready to be published.”

- 9 To further help you track the circle's recurring actions, you should also define and track certain *key metrics* which are reviewed at the start of each weekly meeting. This kind of objective data can be reviewed at a glance, and can make it obvious if performance is improving or worsening.

For example, at Blinkist we track metrics like “Number of publications produced per week,” which enables us to quickly see how our content production capacity has developed over time.

10 Finally, you should also set up two bucket lists for items to be discussed in governance and tactical meetings. At any time during the week, everyone in the circle can add items to these lists, and at the end of the meeting every item will be discussed. The items can be anything that demands input from the entire circle. An example would be a proposal to do something new, or a roadblock that's stopping someone from fulfilling their role.

At Blinkist, we typically encounter bucket list items ranging from "Proposal: let's add actionable advice to all our summaries" to "Roadblock: the slow WiFi at the office is hindering my work."

V Start running weekly tacticals and bimonthly governance meetings

Once your first governance meeting is completed, you should have a solid framework within which to practice Holacracy. Now you just need to set up a *time slot* every 1-3 months for future governance meetings. There, you follow these same steps, but instead of having to define everything from scratch, you merely need to review and revise as needed, so it only takes 1-2 hours.

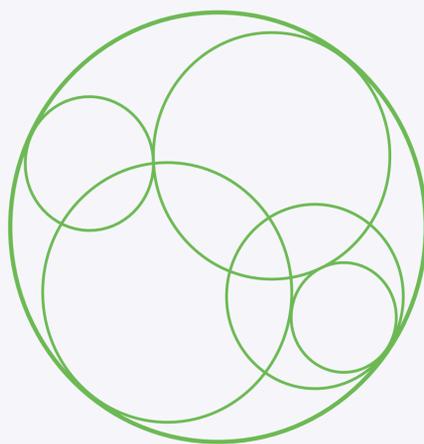
Also set up a one-hour tactical meeting at the beginning of each week. For more precise details on how to run these meetings, please see our appendix on good meeting procedures or check out the [handout](#) HolacracyOne provides.

VI Review the experiment and expand to the rest of the company

Once your experiment has been running for a few months, it's time to take stock of how it's going. This should be enough time to dilute any change resistance, which will allow you to get some objective feedback. If your experience is anything like ours, everyone in the guinea pig circle will be over the moon with the new system, and most likely other teams will already be curious about this "great new thing" they heard about near the water cooler.

This is when you can once again present the idea of company-wide Holacracy to the executive team. Armed with the success of this experiment, you'll be able to make a much more convincing case. If you get the green light for this, the next step is to transform other teams into circles as well, including the executive team, which should become the lead circle, as mentioned earlier.

Finally, you should also set up a circle that's wholly devoted to helping the company stick to Holacracy. The members of this circle are the designated Holacracy-experts in the company. Other circles can direct questions about Holacracy to them, and the Holacracy circle will also occasionally sit in on the meetings of other circles to observe that meeting rules are adhered to.



WHAT TO EXPECT

Effects After the First Months

At Blinkist, our initial Holacracy experiment in the content team proved so successful that after just a few months, we decided to expand it. Now, the entire company operates our “light” Holacracy. Though we’re still constantly learning and improving, we’ve already seen tremendously positive effects:

1 We ended up with more meetings, but it was worth it

This might sound counter-intuitive. Wasn’t the idea to reduce pointless meetings? The answer is yes, but initially, most people will find themselves spending more time in meetings than before. At Blinkist, one person may well be involved in 3-4 circles, so they attend 3-4 tactical meetings every Monday. The good news is that these meetings are all focused and meaningful, so decisions are made and roadblocks cleared faster than ever. The result? Productivity has skyrocketed.

2 The absence of a single person no longer halts progress

Before Holacracy, if a team lead got sick or went on vacation, it basically meant that all progress for that team went on pause. The employees were just about able to handle the business-as-usual tasks, but certainly no improvements or innovations were made. Meanwhile the team lead was fretting constantly about everything falling apart in her absence.

No more. Thanks to recurring tasks, projects and next actions, everyone knows exactly what needs to be done to both keep the business running and improve, so no-one is indispensable.

3 New ideas spring up and are implemented lightning-fast

One element of Holacracy that we found particularly powerful is the bucket list: open agendas for every meeting, whether a tactical, governance meeting or company-wide touch point. This is where everyone at Blinkist can add their ideas, concerns and proposals to be discussed by those present.

So far, bucket lists have spawned many innovative ideas, and the best part is that the best ideas can go directly into implementation, as a decision can be made and the relevant circle formed then and there. One example of this at Blinkist are the audio versions of our books-in-blinks. Adding an audio feature to the app is something that had been discussed for years, but had always been put off because it seemed like much too big a project to tackle. We estimated it would take at least six months to get up and running.

But then after adopting Holacracy, someone brought up the audio feature as an agenda point at a weekly company touch point. Everyone rapidly agreed that this was an important feature we needed, and right then and there a cross-functional circle was formed to attack the project.

The results were astounding: within just two months, audio functionality had been integrated into our product and we had 50 high-quality audio books ready to be published. And this is just one of many similar success stories with other projects. Holacracy really does add a whole new level of agility to your company.

4 Happier employees and a culture of “us”

Holacracy has also helped us become a happier, more tightly-knit organization.

This is because the system of circles and roles gives employees control and responsibility over their work. They themselves know what their current accountabilities are and whether they'd like to take on something new or give something up. This kind of freedom and trust makes them happier and more productive.

What's more, the interconnectedness of circles has really broken down departmental barriers. Originally, when Blinkist had just been founded, the four co-founders each set up their own departments to tackle certain business areas. This resulted in a silo-type organization with very little communication across the departments. Thanks to the overlapping, cross-functional circles and the weekly company-wide touch points, everyone now feels much more like they're in the same boat, rowing in the same direction. This in turn makes the work itself far more motivating, and more fun!

APPENDIX

Holacracy Meeting Rulebook

General Rules

- 1 Each meeting must have a *Facilitator*, who acts as the chairperson and guides the discussion, ensuring there is no cross talk, interrupting and refocusing if necessary, as well as a *Secretary*, who documents the discussion and shares the document with the circle after the meeting.
- 2 Each meeting begins with a *Check-In*, where every participant acknowledges their presence. The purpose is to formally mark the start of the meeting. If there are any overarching issues that may affect their demeanour in the meeting like being sick or stressed, this is the right time to mention them.
- 3 Each meeting has an open *Agenda*, or bucket list, where participants can add items both before and during the meeting. These items should be clearly denoted as *Proposals* or *Roadblocks* depending on their nature. At the end of the meeting, they are discussed and *next actions* derived from them. If it becomes obvious that an agenda item only concerns a sub-group of the people present, the Facilitator should instruct them to set up an issue-specific meeting to deal with it, and close the discussion.
- 4 Each meeting ends with a *Check-Out*, where participants acknowledge the meeting is now over.

Rules for Tactical Meetings

- 1 After the Check-In, the Facilitator runs through the *Checklist* of recurring actions. Those responsible for each action say either “Check” or “No.” If an item has not been completed and it is cause for concern, an Agenda point can be made to discuss it, but the Facilitator must immediately return to going through the checklist.
- 2 The *Metrics* for this week are presented by the person responsible for them, and he or she should also highlight any points of particular interest, like trends or outliers. No discussion should take place, but if necessary, an Agenda point can be added regarding them.
- 3 The Facilitator then moves on to the *Project Updates*. Here, each project is examined one by one. The Next Actions from the previous week are checked off and new ones added in their place.
- 4 After the Project Updates, the Facilitator announces it’s time for *Agenda Building*. This is the last chance to add something to the Agenda for this week.
- 5 Next, the Agenda items are processed as described in the general rules.
- 6 Finally, every meeting participant checks out.

Rules for Governance Meetings

- 1 After the Check-In, the meeting starts with a *Review of the Circle's Purpose*. This one-sentence definition is revised if new learnings or a new company strategy make it necessary.
- 2 Next, the *Roles and Accountabilities* of everyone in the circle are reviewed and revised if necessary. Some accountabilities may no longer be relevant, or a new role may be required to pursue the circle's new purpose.
- 3 The Checklist and Metrics used in the Tacticals are reviewed. Are they still in line with the circle's purpose? Are they delivering the information they should? If not, they need to be revised.
- 4 The current Projects are reviewed. Have any of them attained their goal? If so, the project can be marked as completed. And if the new purpose of the circle necessitates new projects, they can be added to the list, along with next actions.
- 5 After the Project Updates, the Facilitator announces it's time for Agenda Building. This is the last chance to add something to the Agenda for this week.
- 6 Next, the Agenda items are processed as described in the general rules.
- 7 Finally, every meeting participant checks out.

Like what you read?

Share it with your friends with the hashtag #Blinkracy101 to win a one-year Blinkist Premium subscription for your team of up to 5 people. You'll be armed with all the books-in-blinks you need to remake your organization!



This work is licensed under a *Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial International License*

Blinkracy Ben Hughes & Sebastian Klein
published 2015 ©

 **Blinkist**
Blinks Labs GmbH
Berlin, Germany
blinkist.com

Design
Dominik Wagner