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Holacracy and pluralistic bureaucracy: a longitudinal case studyTítol de la tesi

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DOCTORAL THESIS

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Directed by	Dr. Ignasi Martí Lanuza Dr. Robert Wayne Gregory

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Introduction

This chapter introduces the topic of the PhD thesis and presents its structure and content.

1.1 Introduction to the Topic of the PhD Thesis

Post-bureaucratic organization has become a rising trend in organizational design, particularly flat organization and self-management, shifting power relations (Clegg, Courpasson, & Phillips, 2006; Hamel, 2011; Hamel, 2014; Hamel & Zanini, 2018; Heckscher & Donnellon, 1994; Kudaravalli, Faraj, & Johnson, 2017; McKenna, Garcia-Lorenzo, & Bridgman, 2010). Previously seen as a fringe concept perhaps only applicable to the most exclusive tech startups, there are indications that the idea of team-based agile processes and agile organizations typical of self-management are becoming more mainstream for organizations of all sizes (Lee & Xia, 2010; Rigby, Sutherland, & Noble, 2018). Research in post-bureaucratic organization has been mixed, including negative outcomes such as unproductive forms of control and behavior resulting from the attempts to flatten the organization (Barker, 1993; Foss, 2003; Stewart, Astrove, Reeves, Crawford, & Solimeo, 2017). On the other hand, other research has indicated the potential for empowerment and innovation as positive outcomes for organizations attempting to organize in less hierarchical ways (Aime, Humphrey, DeRue, & Paul, 2014; Courpasson, Dany, & Clegg, 2012; Csaszar, 2012; Nan & Lu, 2014). Furthermore, it is useful in general to explore diversity in organizational research as a means of advancing the field (Svejenova, 2019), and thus studying these innovations in organizational structure might yield constructive findings for the study of organization.

Recently holacracy has emerged as a less hierarchical yet bureaucratic organizational system (Bernstein, Bunch, Canner, & Lee, 2016; Robertson, 2015), and it stands in contrast with the organic nature of flat organization that has been examined more extensively and is thus more understood based on previous research (Lee & Edmondson, 2017; Laloux, 2014). In contrast to organic forms of managing, holacracy is highly rule-based, relying on technology for its day-to-day operation and as a means of providing transparency into the organization's structure, policies, processes, and work activities (Robertson, 2015). Because holacracy provides such transparency, this provides a unique opportunity to study self-management in detail, in contrast to more organic forms that are more opaque to the outside view.

Previous research in less hierarchical organization has been fragmented across self-management (Gerpott, Lehmann-Willenbrock, Voelpel, & van Vugt, 2019; Lee & Xia, 2010; Manz & Sims, 1995; Nan & Lu, 2014) and post-bureaucratic organization (Heckscher, 1994; Heckscher & Donnellon, 1994; Kallinikos, 2004; Thompson & Alvesson, 2005; Walton, 2016), focusing either more on micro-level aspects of teams and individuals (self-management) or on a more conceptual, macro-level of organizational trends (post-bureaucracy). Little research on less hierarchical organizations has focused on the mechanics of how these organizational systems work in a detailed way. On one hand, this is surprising because the phenomenon itself and interest in flat organization has been steadily increasing over time (Hamel, 2011; Laloux 2014). On the other hand, previous to the use of holacracy as an organizational system, studying self-management often meant forays into highly customized, informal organizations where it would be difficult if not impossible to disentangle the effects of organizational aspects such as leadership or culture from the specific mechanisms of what made the organization non-hierarchical, and the effects of these mechanisms (Foss, 2003). The discrete specification of holacracy (Robertson, 2015) has given the opportunity to study the phenomenon of post-bureaucratic, flat organization from a detailed and informed perspective, which is valuable given the rise of these forms of organization.

Therefore, the first overarching research question of this PhD thesis is to empirically examine how an organization practicing holacracy is able to function, in *order to theorize the phenomenon of post-bureaucratic organization. To address this first overarching research question, the qualitative research methodology and grounded theory building methodology are applied, resulting in a model of pluralistic bureaucracy.*

As the interest in organizational systems such as holacracy continues to rise, organizations are attempting to restructure to become more flat (Laloux, 2014). Self-management has become an attractive option in the range of available organizational structures for companies seeking innovative and entrepreneurial outcomes (Hamel & Zanini, 2018). Thus, some firms existing previously as hierarchies are converting to more non-hierarchical structures whose core tenet is self-management (Gelles, 2015; Silverman, 2015). A yet unanswered question in the literature on post-bureaucratic organization is: How do managers, as a significantly impacted category of organizational actors, cope with this organizational transformation to self-management? Little research has been generated on how managers are impacted in the conversion to an organizational structure that has no formal managers. This is unexpected because flat organization is becoming more common, and existing companies are making the conversion in organizational structure, which is likely to impact employees who previously functioned as managers. These employees that were formerly managers are an important but neglected category of actors (Thomas & Linstead, 2002). They are important in this context because their position in the previous hierarchy provided them with leadership functions that could impact the subsequent effectiveness in the conversion to flat organization.

Subsequently, the second overarching research question of this PhD thesis is to empirically investigate how managers unmoored by the organization's conversion to self-management are affected and in turn may affect the organization. To address this second overarching research question, qualitative research methodology is applied, resulting in *a temporal process model and propositions about how unmoored managers may affect the autonomy of their teams.*

As more employees experience flat organization, there is increased opportunity to study actors who have experienced both hierarchical and non-hierarchical organizational structures. Working in hierarchical and non-hierarchical structures is a subjective experience, and it can be particularly difficult to understand and accurately describe non-hierarchical experiences because they are not widely understood in work practice. While objectivity, distance, and other disciplined techniques to avoid bias in qualitative research are imperative in many research settings, these very approaches may limit what can be learned when studying novel phenomenon.

Accordingly, the third overarching research question of this PhD thesis is to explore and conceptualize the usefulness of subjectivity and intimacy in the research approach of novel phenomenon. To address this third overarching research question, concepts are developed to build an early theorization of hermeneutic intimacy.

In summary, this PhD thesis investigates and theorizes upon how post-bureaucratic organizations function and affect former managers who experience its autonomous practices, using qualitative and inductive theory building research and analysis techniques, thereby presenting a robust exploration and analysis of the phenomenon. Furthermore, I conceptualize a research approach that may advance further investigation into this phenomenon.

1.2 Structure and Content of the PhD Thesis

This PhD thesis is structured in the form of a monograph based on unpublished articles. The structure and content overview of this PhD thesis are presented below:

Chapter 2 explains the overarching framework of this PhD thesis. It includes the theoretical background and identifies the research gaps. It also identifies the research questions and general research approach of the articles presented in chapters 3, 4, and 5.

Chapter 3 addresses the first overarching research question of this PhD thesis. It empirically examines how an organization practicing holacracy is able to function, in order to theorize the phenomenon of flat organization. In addition, it intends to inductively build theory that explains how post-bureaucratic organization works. The title of this chapter is “Peering beyond bureaucratic control: Reconciling autonomy and alignment in the pluralistic bureaucracy” and has been co-authored with Dr. Robert Wayne Gregory and Dr. John Almandoz. This article is targeted for submission to *Organization Science*.

Chapter 4 investigates the second overarching research question of this PhD thesis. It empirically investigates how managers unmoored by the organization’s conversion to self-management are affected and in turn may affect their teams. The title of this chapter is “From hierarchy to self-management: How unmoored managers cope with transformation of organizational form.” This article is targeted for submission to *Academy of Management Journal*.

Chapter 5 reflects upon the research process by which I undertook Chapters 3 and 4. It explores the possibility of the usefulness of subjectivity and intimacy in the research approach of novel phenomenon and provides early theorization. The title of this chapter is “Navigating the Space and Ethics of Ethnography” and this paper was published in 2020 by the journal *M@n@gement*.

Chapter 6 contains the conclusion of this PhD thesis. It includes an integrated discussion of theoretical contributions, implications for practitioners, limitations and future research opportunities presented by chapters 3, 4, and 5.

A combined list of references for all chapters of this PhD thesis concludes the dissertation.

2

Overarching Framework

This chapter discusses the theoretical background, identifies the research gaps, and presents the research questions and general research approach of the articles presented in chapters 3, 4, and 5.

2.1 Post-bureaucratic Organization and Self-management

For decades, scholars have theorized that organizations in the post-industrial age must adapt to a swiftly changing, complex environment. According to Huber, this "organizational adaptability" may manifest in "experimenting" or "self-designing" organizations, that is "organizations characterized by frequent nearly-continuous change in structures, processes, domains, goals, etc., even in the face of apparently optimal adaptation" (1984: 940). Speaking from his vantage point 40 years ago, Huber predicted that in today's organizations, decision-making process and innovation would take on paramount importance. Huber drew from assertions from Hedberg, Nystrom & Starbuck, who stated that "truly effective modifications of processes would improve an organization's propensities to learn, to correct flaws in its design, and to experiment with alternative structures and strategies" (1976: 43). Over time, these ideas have grown into concepts of post-bureaucratic organization, including self-management, and exploring novel forms of organization continues to echo through the years in today's management scholarship (Contractor, DeChurch, Carson, Carter & Keegan, 2012; Pearce, Wassenaar & Manz, 2014; Cullen-Lester & Yammarino, 2016). While much has been discussed about the need for "self-designing" organizations to evolve how employees are treated and to meet market challenges, little is known about what specific system of processes are used in these types of organizations and how they work to be flexible yet structurally sound.

Post-bureaucratic organizations, including ones that operate without formal managers, are becoming more common worldwide (Hamel, 2011; Heckscher and Donnellon, 1994). Boss-less organizational systems are being adopted increasingly due to both external and internal factors (Hamel, 2014; Lee & Edmondson, 2017). Externally, the environment many companies face is VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous), a pluralistic context that upends the formality and chain of command of hierarchy due to the need for fast responses and highly specialized knowledge workers that likely know more about their domain than their managers do (Eisenhardt, 2000; Jarzabkowski & Fenton, 2006). Internally, employees have greater expectations for autonomy, to make an impact, and to have their voice be heard (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). But when employees want increased autonomy, what keeps the organization from flying apart (Hedberg et al., 1976)?

The fundamental tension of how to give employees autonomy while retaining organizational control has long been a topic in management scholarship (Astley and Van de Ven, 1983). Current turbulent conditions seem to point to the need for all within an organization to work toward a common purpose and with greater autonomy, thus resulting in emerging trends to reduce or remove supervising management (Hamel, 2011). Without managers, in a context of pluralism (Fox, 1966), for an organization to operate, some type of mechanism of alignment seems necessary to replace the "command and control" function of a boss in a typical managerial hierarchy. Few studies have addressed what this non-managerial alignment mechanism might be and how it could operate at adequate speed in complex situations, particularly for larger organizations where autonomy can be more difficult to scale. Additionally, there is the question of how this alignment can remain flexible and empowering for employees over time (Adler & Borys, 1996; Thompson & Alvesson, 2005).

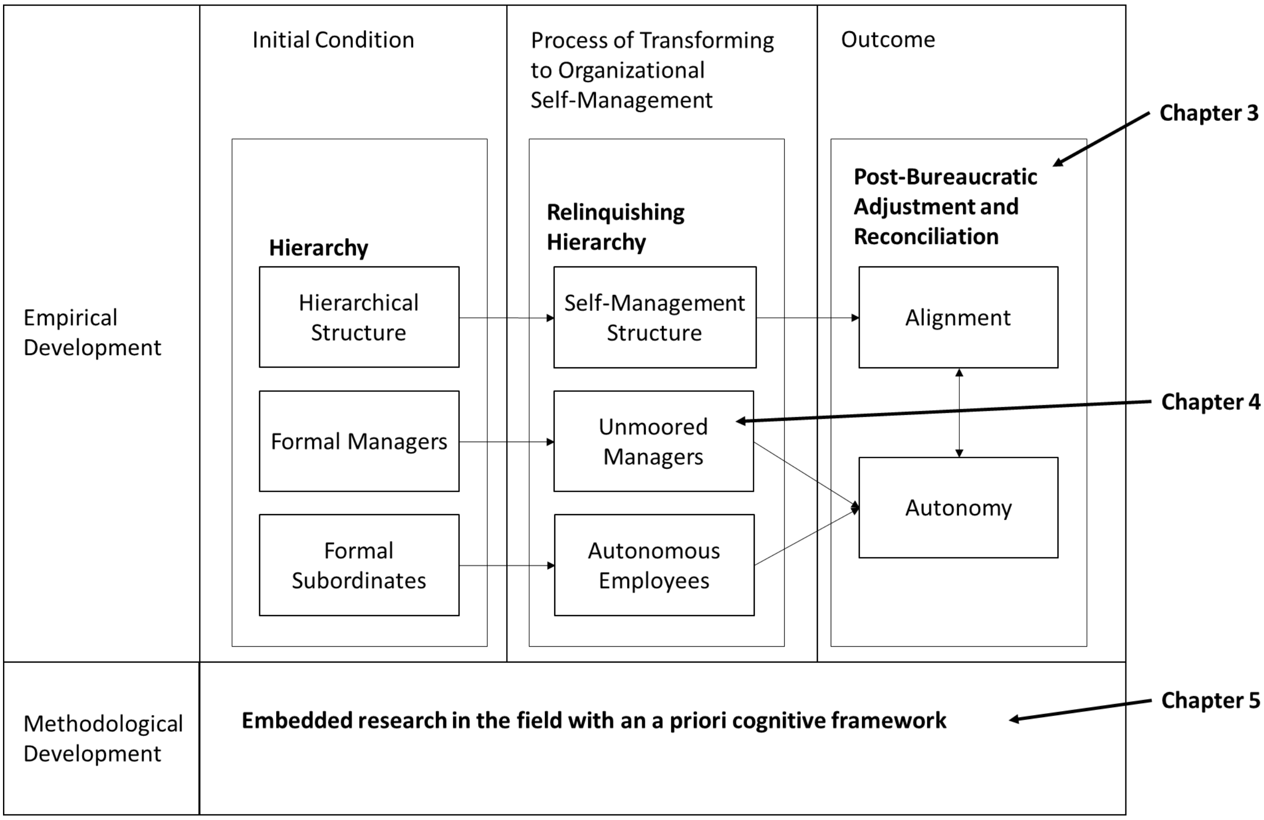
This thesis speaks to the emerging field of scholarship around self-management in larger organizations (Laloux, 2014; Rigby, Sutherland, & Noble, 2018). The focus is in how larger organizations restructure in order to provide greater autonomy for their employees, and how this change in structure impacts the employees. This thesis attempts to provide empirical substance and theorization about the dynamic of organizational self-management. Figure 2.1 illustrates the structure of the thesis and how the chapters relate to its overall mission. In this illustration, the initial condition of hierarchy, where there are formal managers and subordinates, is noted in order to describe the overall historical context of the research site. The thesis focuses on what happens once the organization relinquishes hierarchy, with a particular focus on former managers, as well as the mechanisms that develop in order to maintain alignment and autonomy in the absence of a managerial hierarchy.

From the foundation of methodological development, I documented my path of reconciling my history of work in the IT industry, which gave me an insider view to my focal research site, with my research as an ethnographer. Over the course of my longitudinal research, I incorporated the fact that I had years of professional experience related to the research site, in other words, an a priori cognitive framework, into my research approach, and evolved the perspective of hermeneutic intimacy, which is the subject of Chapter 5.

Moving to the empirical development of the thesis, in the initial condition of the chosen research site, the organization existed as a typical managerial hierarchy, with formal managers and subordinates. The process of an organization transforming to self-management required actors to relinquish hierarchy, replacing it with a self-management structure. This transformation was intended to give more autonomy to employees, and also had the effect of "unmooring" managers, or removing them from formal positional authority in a managerial hierarchy. This unmooring results in struggles and changes in behavior and identity, impacting the former managers as well as their associated teams. Unmoored managers are the focus of Chapter 4.

In the outcome of the process of transforming to self-management, the resulting post-bureaucratic organization had to find mechanisms to replace those that had been functioning in the hierarchy. Chiefly, how did the organization, as it promoted autonomy, continue to find ways of aligning its activities in the absence of a formal managerial hierarchy? This reconciliation is the focus of Chapter 3.

Figure 2.1. Thesis Theoretical Structure



Therefore, the question of how large organizations flexibly reconcile autonomy and alignment is an important puzzle to solve, which this thesis attempts to address. To address this first overarching research question (see Chapter 3), we leverage the case of a governmental organization practicing holacracy. We find that the traditional tradeoff between autonomy versus control is replaced in this pluralistic structure by a complementary and mutually reinforcing duality of autonomy *and* alignment. Our model explains the interplay between three key mechanisms of what we call pluralistic bureaucracy—codifying freedom, systematizing change, and normalizing disagreement—which are formed through the intermeshing of formal and informal organizational components that boost both autonomy and alignment. Pivotal among these mechanisms of pluralistic bureaucracy is normalizing disagreement, where disagreement and tension is a normal condition that drives structural flexibility in organizations. Our work has important implications for understanding the flexibility of bureaucracies, as they adapt to internal and external demands for change.

Furthermore, few studies have examined how an extant organization moving from a traditional managerial hierarchy to a less hierarchical post-bureaucratic form can affect its managers, who may lose their title and positional authority. Previous studies in self-management focus on the experiences of non-managerial workers, namely whether they experience greater autonomy or performance (Lee & Xia, 2010; Millikin, Hom, & Manz, 2010). This is an issue because not all organizations are natively self-managing; some existing organizations decide to make the transformation due to the promised benefits that self-management brings. Consequently, managers who do not make the transition well may have negative experiences and impacts to their organization (Conroy & O'Leary-Kelly, 2014; Langfred and Rockmann, 2016).

Therefore, a key question is: how do managers, as a significantly impacted category of organizational actors, cope with organizational transformation to self-management? This thesis attempts to answer this in the second overarching research question (see Chapter 4), shedding light regarding the complexity and ambiguity that former managers experience in a post-bureaucratic context. The study focused on eight managers at a governmental organization that transitioned from traditional managerial hierarchy to holacracy, revealing a range of emergent behaviors of managers “unmoored” by the organization’s conversion to self-management, which are detailed in a temporal process model. These findings have implications for researchers investigating self-management phenomenon and practitioners seeking effective self-management implementation.

As more employees experience flat organization, there is increased opportunity to study actors who have experienced both hierarchical and less hierarchical organizational structures. Working in these structures is a subjective experience, and it can be particularly difficult to understand and accurately describe experiences of non-hierarchy because they are not widely understood in work practice. When studying novel phenomenon, disciplined techniques to avoid bias such as objectivity and distance may limit what can be learned on site and insights that may be gleaned through analysis.

Accordingly, the third overarching research question of this PhD thesis (see Chapter 5) is to explore and conceptualize the usefulness of subjectivity and intimacy in the research approach of novel phenomenon, resulting in an early theorization of hermeneutic intimacy. Hermeneutic intimacy may be a useful approach when gaining insight from employees about the how post-bureaucratic organization functions and how it feels to participate.

These three chapters answering the thesis research questions are synergistic and complement each other in examining different facets of post-bureaucracy and self-management, from the empirical as well as the methodological standpoint. They reinforce each other and together build up into a broader understanding about how novel organizational structures in the post-bureaucracy context function and how they impact employees.

2.2 Research Context

I undertook ethnographic research for four years at a U.S. governmental agency using holacracy, an emerging self-management organizational structure, through interviews, participant observation and archival research. The case subject (Yin, 2014) is unique particularly because such a novel organizational strategy is unexpected in government, yet government as classic bureaucracy presents an interesting case to try a post-bureaucratic organizational form. Holacracy does not have managers; instead it operates through interlinked self-managing and self-governing teams. Holacracy is researched in order to develop inductive theory (Gerring, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Holacracy is reportedly used by more than one thousand companies in North and South America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australia within 10 years of its creation, the largest of which is Zappos, a U.S. online retail company with an estimated 2,000 employees. Zappos converted to the holacracy model in 2015, which has made this organizational form prominent in business reporting. The fact that this organization has undertaken this experimental model is known in the mainstream American media, having had coverage in both *The New York Times* (Gelles, 2015) and *The Wall Street Journal* (Silverman, 2015). Holacracy claims to be different from the typical self-organization or "flat" organizational structure due to its formal process documentation.

The name holacracy derives from the Greek word *holon*, meaning a whole that is part of a greater whole. Holacracy can be defined as a social technology or system of organizational governance in which authority and decision-making are distributed through self-organizing teams rather than through a management hierarchy (Rud, 2009). In holacracy, instead of job descriptions or titles, there are dynamic roles that are updated regularly, and instead of managers, authority is distributed to teams.

Finally, the overarching and the specific research questions of this PhD thesis, and the associated methodologies with which these questions are addressed are presented in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Research questions, objectives and methodologies

Chapter	Overarching research questions	Specific research objectives	Methodologies
3	To empirically examine how organizations without formal managers function	To empirically investigate how large organizations flexibly reconcile autonomy and alignment To build theory about pluralistic bureaucracy	Qualitative
4	To empirically investigate how former managers experience moving from a hierarchy to a self-managing organizational form	To empirically investigate emergent behaviors of unmoored managers during the process of conversion to self-management To build a temporal process model of self-management conversion	Qualitative
5	To reflect upon ethnographic research	To present early theorization on the concept of hermeneutic intimacy	Conceptual

3

Peering Beyond Bureaucratic Control: Reconciling Autonomy and Alignment in the Pluralistic Bureaucracy

This chapter aims to address the first overarching research question of this PhD thesis by empirically investigating how organizations function without formal managers.

3.1 ABSTRACT

The viability of bureaucracy is often questioned in today's organizational settings, where employees need and demand more voice and discretion to resolve tensions and deal with multiple objectives. In such contexts, an alternative to the traditional model of hierarchical control may be needed for bureaucratic organizations to reconcile alignment with more autonomy. We leverage the case of an organization practicing holacracy, a self-organizing and rule-based pluralistic structure that downplays formal managers, to explore answers to this fundamental question of organizing. We find that the traditional tradeoff between autonomy versus control is replaced in this pluralistic structure by a complementary and mutually reinforcing duality of autonomy *and* alignment. Our model explains the interplay between three key mechanisms of what we call pluralistic bureaucracy—codifying freedom, systematizing change, and normalizing disagreement—which are formed through the intermeshing of formal and informal organizational components that boost both autonomy and alignment. Pivotal among these mechanisms of pluralistic bureaucracy is normalizing disagreement. Our work has important implications for understanding the flexibility of bureaucracies, as they adapt to internal and external demands for change.

3.2 INTRODUCTION

Corporate leaders yearn for a flexible organizational model that transcends stifling bureaucratic control yet keeps an increasingly autonomous workforce aligned with the organization's direction in ever more complex settings, where employees need and demand more voice and discretion. On one hand, workers, particularly digitally empowered younger employees, expect full *autonomy* to take initiative and work on their own terms outside of a rigid chain of command to perform at their best, pursue unconventional ideas, and make fast decisions (Hall, 1968; Notter, 2018). On the other hand, while agreeing that traditional bureaucratic control can undermine *autonomy*, even leaders in companies with cultures of high worker autonomy such as Netflix and Spotify conclude that some form of *alignment* is needed to ensure that the ever-adapting organization does not fly apart (Hedberg, Nystrom, & Starbuck, 1976; Rigby, Sutherland, & Noble, 2018). For the organization to maintain coherence, employees must somehow blend freedom with responsibility, in other words to enact "freedom within a framework" (Gulati, 2018), so that their activities stay in alignment with the organization's overall purpose and strategy, even as they strive to make progress according to multiple goals and objectives (Eisenhardt, 2000). The challenge of integrating *autonomy* and *alignment* grows with necessary formalization as the size of the organization increases (Blau, 1970; Blau & Schoenherr, 1971: 58-59). Small teams in small firms can readily make flexible arrangements for organizing by relying on social structures and informal processes, while large companies, depending more on a formal structure (Hamel & Zanini, 2018), often struggle to achieve disciplined autonomy and structured flexibility and avoid trapping people in an iron cage (Gabriel, 2005; Scott, 2003: 99; Weick, 1979: 215). Essentially, larger organizations are caught in a bind.

This predicament of larger organizations, to flex yet cohere at scale, by reconciling *autonomy* and *alignment*, permeates the ongoing scholarly debate about the viability of bureaucracy in modern settings (Brès, Raufflet, & Boghossian, 2018; du Gay, 2005; Turco, 2016). Two different views have emerged. The first view critiques traditional bureaucracy for imposing inflexible bureaucratic control through formal rules that demand compliance and reduce worker autonomy, thus harming employee motivation and commitment to change (Katz, 1965; Salaman, 2005). While empirical studies consistent with this view suggest that autonomy and alignment can perhaps be reconciled to achieve flexibility without relying on traditional bureaucratic control, they have mostly focused on informal processes (e.g., communication, trust, emotional intelligence) at the project or team level (Haas, 2010; Hodgson, 2004; Langfred, 2004, 2007), leaving open the question whether the reconciliation between autonomy and alignment can also be achieved in larger organizations that also rely on formal systems inherent in bureaucracies. The second view argues that formal systems inherent in bureaucracies (e.g., rules, standards, processes) have "a natural flexibility, tenacity, and adaptability" (Reed, 2005: 124) and "need not be antithetical to flexibility" (Thompson & Alvesson, 2005: 96), suggesting that the quest for reconciling autonomy and alignment in larger organizations is not necessarily inhibited, but perhaps even enabled, by the use of bureaucratic structures (Adler & Borys, 1996; Engel, 1970). This view, however, is limited as the presented arguments remain theoretical and have not been explored sufficiently through in-depth empirical studies in an organizational context.

Taken as a whole, the debate about the flexibility and viability of bureaucracy in modern environments is confusing; it depicts the simultaneous rise and fall of the bureaucratic organization, where even while bureaucracy persists and continues to grow, its desirability is regularly contested. A recent meta-analysis of the literature on bureaucratic organization highlights that the predominant focus of scholarly work in this area has been on bureaucratic and hierarchical control (Walton, 2016). This unitary frame of reference (Fox, 1966), however, is not necessarily the most fruitful assumption ground for resolving the incoherence in the literature about the complexity of reconciling autonomy and alignment, often characterized by pluralism (Eisenhardt, 2000). Pluralism involves multiple and varied objectives, knowledge-based work and diffuse power (Adler, 2012; Brès et al., 2018; Denis, Lamothe, & Langley, 2001; Denis, Langley, & Rouleau, 2007; Hardy, 1991; Hodgson, 2004; Jarzabkowski & Fenton, 2006; McSweeney

& Harris, 2006; Reed, 2005; Schulz, 1998). In this pluralistic frame of reference, the lines between managers and employees are blurred since all employees participate actively in day-to-day management and bring their expertise to address complex objectives (Fox, 1966).

The purpose of this paper is to explore the possibilities of large organizations for flexibly reconciling autonomy and alignment, thus becoming viable in complex environments. We argue that the potential of bureaucracies for flexibility has not been adequately understood until we explore how they can operate as pluralistic structures. Our contribution to the literature is a model for how this reconciliation may happen without relying on traditional top-down bureaucratic control. We developed that model by drawing on a three-year ethnographic study at a mid-size organization that adopted holacracy, a self-organizing and rule-based pluralistic bureaucracy that understates formal managers. By downplaying managers, holacracy reconciles *autonomy* and *alignment* through attributes of the organizational system itself, and not by manager determinations. Through our study, we found that the traditional and paradoxical tradeoff between autonomy *versus* control, was transformed in this pluralistic structure, into a complementary and mutually reinforcing duality (Farjoun, 2010) of autonomy *and* alignment. Based on our observations, we defined the mechanisms of pluralistic bureaucracy, which are formed through the intermeshing of formal and informal organizational elements that boost both autonomy and alignment. In the pluralistic bureaucracy, the rules are not relaxed, but instead are transformed to account for a more complex set of tensions and interactions, opening a path for worker social and emotional engagement. Pivotal among these mechanisms of pluralistic bureaucracy was *normalizing disagreement*.

3.3 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

3.3.1 Different Views about Bureaucracy's Flexibility and Viability in Modern Environments

Bureaucracy, as an ideal type is a "rationalized moral alternative" to personal, authoritarian administration in the pre-industrial world, "from which modern bureaucratic and industrial organization emerged" (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2013: 94). Its main features (Adler, 2012; Weber, 1978)—including, for example, specialization and division of labor, hierarchical organization, and formal rules and regulations—had an important role to play not only in the industrial revolution but also later in the emergence of management and the corporation (Chandler, 1993). Corporate bureaucracies governed organizations rationally with arguably positive results in efficiency, productivity, predictability, and procedural fairness and equality of treatment (du Gay, 2005: 52; Weber, 1946). Bureaucratic elements (Kallinikos, 2004; Walton, 2016), are present not only in traditional organizations but also in new organizational forms (Puranam, Alexy, & Reitzig, 2014), which suggests that they have an enduring permanence. Yet, anti-bureaucratic sentiments have been increasingly common for decades, among both practitioners and academics who criticize experiences of "red tape," waste and inefficiency, and barriers to change and innovation (Hamel, 2014; Newman, 2005).

Two different views about bureaucracy's flexibility and viability in modern environments have emerged from the scholarly discourse. The first view criticizes bureaucracy's inflexibility and inability to cope with the demands of increasingly dynamic, uncertain, and complex environments (Lee & Edmondson, 2017; McCarthy, Lawrence, Wixted, & Gordon, 2010; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). This criticism has its roots in the effects of bureaucratic control (Walton, 2016), the result of formal rules, guidelines, and procedures that prescribe people's behaviors, and which are determined by hierarchical leaders (Gulati & Puranam, 2009). Critics lament the coercive and potentially authoritarian character of bureaucratic control (Bendix, 1947), reflecting a dark side already discussed by Weber (1947: 339). This coercive aspect of bureaucracy relying on bosses and top-down rules and procedures for *alignment* could have negative consequences for employee *autonomy* (Adler & Borys, 1996), and therefore for their motivation, job satisfaction (Arches, 1991), and commitment (Walton, 1985)—especially among knowledge workers in complex environments (Bennis, 1966; Thompson, 1965).

Autonomy has been defined in organizational contexts as the discretion and freedom of employees in the execution of work activities and organizational change (Katz, 1965; Kellogg, 2018; Mazmanian, Orlikowski, & Yates, 2013), and *alignment* as the coherence among work activities to resolve tensions that arise and to contribute toward the same organizational purpose (Bacharach, Bamberger, & Sonnenstuhl, 1996; Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004). By focusing on bureaucratic control to achieve alignment, individual autonomy is often undermined as it is subordinated to the interests of hierarchical leaders, thereby limiting the organizations' ability to flex and adapt to changing external or internal requirements recognized first at lower levels (Heckscher & Donnellon, 1994). Against this backdrop, some scholars claim that bureaucracy is "hopelessly out of joint with contemporary realities" (Bennis, 1965: 31), given technological advances, the increasing level of education, and the motivation and mobility of employees (Hamel & Zanini, 2018; McClelland, 1961; Parker, Wall, & Jackson, 1997). While it may have played a useful role in the transition from arbitrariness to rationality, critics say that today it wastes intelligence, reproduces conformity and "group-think," and constrains the "informal organization," thus undermining collaboration, reciprocity, and shared responsibility, and produces inertia and organizational siloes, thus hindering organizational adaptability (Bennis, 1965;

Heckscher, 1994). No surprise here: according to some of these scholars, "bureaucracy must die" (Hamel, 2014: 4).

The view of bureaucracy's inflexibility stemming from persistent tensions between organizational alignment and employee autonomy produced by the model of bureaucratic control has led some scholars to explore alternative 'post-bureaucratic' structures and systems, including self-managing teams (Barker, 1993; Gerpott, Lehmann-Willenbrock, Voelpel, & van Vugt, 2019; Haas, 2010; Langfred, 2007); temporary organizations where a team works on a complex task over a limited period of time (Bakker, 2010; Bennis, 1965, 1969); virtual organizations with networked structures (Ahuja & Carley, 1999; Nohria & Berkley, 1994); and shared leadership within organizations (Nordbäck & Espinosa, 2019; Zhu, Liao, Yam, & Johnson, 2018). A key contribution these studies have made is showing how small teams such as self-managing teams (Gerpott et al., 2019) have been able to simultaneously reconcile high degrees of autonomy and alignment by relying on close proximity and informal elements, including emergent leadership, shared culture and values, trust, cooperation, and open communication (Morand, 1995; Oh, 2012; Taggar, Hackett, & Saha, 1999). Informal elements are likely to be important in postmodern workplaces as described by Gabriel "where traditional rational/bureaucratic controls are being replaced by an array of controls operating through language, emotion, space and exposure" (Gabriel, 2005: 18). However, it is an open question whether such informal processes fostering employee autonomy are scalable inside large organizations that also require the consistency of formal rules, standards, and processes (Gulati & Puranam, 2009), that typically restrict autonomy (Mazmanian et al., 2013).

And yet, according to the second less explored view, bureaucracies can be designed as enabling (rather than constraining) systems that facilitate autonomy (Adler &

Borys, 1996) and are adaptable and flexible rather than stifling or demotivating (Child & McGrath, 2001; Reed, 2005: 124; Thompson & Alvesson, 2005: 96). Defenders of bureaucracy stress that building organizations on the basis of standardization—i.e., widespread adoption and diffusion of uniform behavioral scripts to define and solve problems—ensures organizational alignment by promoting behavioral congruence with formalized rules (Clement & Puranam, 2018; Höpfl, 2006; Kallinikos, 2004) but without necessarily limiting employee voice and discretion. Defenders also claim that designing organizations based on roles, which are abstract operational requirements separated from persons (i.e., non-inclusive principle), makes organizations flexible because roles are easier to change than people (Thompson & Alvesson, 2005), potentially allowing employees to more easily adapt their work based on rapidly changing needs. In contrast to the former view which places great emphasis on informal processes as a way of overcoming the limitations and inflexibility of traditional bureaucracies, this less explored alternative view of bureaucracy creates high expectations for formal systems (e.g., rules, standards, processes), while downplaying the important role of informal processes.

In sum, the literature on bureaucratic organization is incoherent as scholars disagree on whether or not it can be flexible and thus whether it is viable for complex environments, yet both views make important contributions to understanding how autonomy and alignment can be reconciled in large organizations that must involve a mix of formal and informal elements to flex yet cohere at scale. In order to solve the incoherence in the literature and have a more solid theoretical foundation for our empirical study, it is useful to revisit the literature's underlying assumption ground (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011), which we will do next.

3.3.2 Unitary Versus Pluralistic Bureaucracy

A core underlying assumption of the literature on bureaucracy has been the unitary frame of reference (Walton, 2016). This term describes systems with “one source of authority and one focus of loyalty” (Fox, 1966: 3). In this frame, bureaucracy is a centralized structure of “hierarchically arranged authority” (Gouldner, 1954: 19) ensuring tight alignment of activities with organizational goals and objectives based on bureaucratic control (Adler, 2012). Strategic direction is defined at the top, managerial control is tight, and conflicts are resolved by moving up the chain of command (Fayol, 1949). Bureaucratic control allows managers to set up the rules and modulate the employee autonomy as they deem appropriate (Reed, 2005). We argue that the main criticisms of bureaucracy for its coercive and authoritarian character and its inflexibility are connected to its unitary bureaucratic control. For example, Heckscher’s claim (1994) that bureaucracies only use a small fraction of the capacity of its members (i.e., the waste of intelligence), presumes that employees are not involved in designing the structures and defining the goals that govern their work. His argument that bureaucracy fails to secure commitment from the informal organization (i.e., the formal-informal organization split) assumes that the only relevant aspect of bureaucracy is the top-down bureaucratic structures, which fail to engage employees. Finally, his claim that bureaucracies change only periodically and painfully through punctuated and disruptive restructuring initiatives led by top managers (i.e., the crudeness of organization change) presumes also that organizational change is always carefully planned by managers rather than something continuous that is distributed and enabled by both managers and employees (Heckscher, 1994).

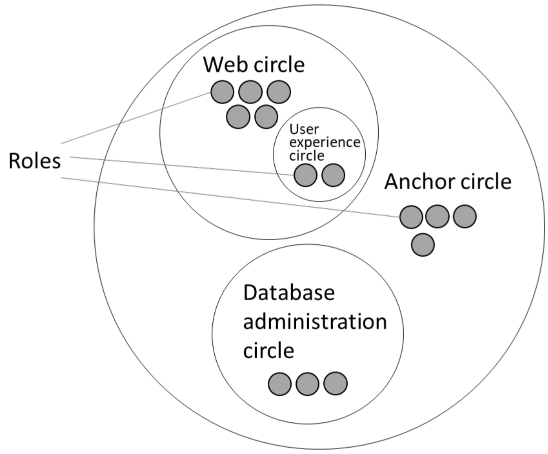
What is overlooked by this criticism of bureaucracy is that the unitary frame of reference may not necessarily provide the most fruitful foundation for making theoretical advancements about bureaucracy and organizational structures (Kuhn, 1962). The main reason is that organizations are increasingly under pressure to enable front-line workers to participate in decision-making and to resolve tensions more rapidly and directly, thereby driving the organization's direction by means of their individual voices and perspectives (Denis et al., 2001; Eisenhardt, 2000; Jarzabkowski & Fenton, 2006; Lewis, 2000; Morrison & Milliken, 2000). This requires them to create pluralistic systems capable of dealing with multiple and varied objectives, knowledge-based work and distributed authority (Adler, 2012; Brès et al., 2018; Denis et al., 2001; Denis et al., 2007; Hardy, 1991; Hodgson, 2004; Jarzabkowski & Fenton, 2006; McSweeney & Harris, 2006; Reed, 2005; Schulz, 1998). It is an open question, however, to what extent bureaucratic organizations are compatible with this pluralistic frame of reference.

We center our discussion of bureaucracy on a pluralistic frame of reference, and define a pluralistic bureaucracy as a complex and flexible organization, with multilayered formal systems and processes and clearly defined roles, that enables knowledgeable actors in the organization with distributed authority and diverse perspectives to cooperate on substantive issues and to drive the design and direction of the organization. As a potentially flexible and equitable structure, bureaucracy may be compatible with complex modern settings where the distinction between managers and employees is blurred and where autonomous employees feel more empowered than constrained (Adler & Borys, 1996). For those reasons, it may be better equipped for environments characterized by high rates of change, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity that require wide engagement within the organization (Sine, Mitsuhashi, & Kirsch, 2006), and may be more attractive to a demanding and educated workforce that has expectations for greater autonomy and individual voice in organizations. A pluralistic bureaucracy may be a promising way to scale employee autonomy and flexible organizing in larger organizations that often require a greater reliance on formal systems to ensure alignment. Thus, we argue that a more fruitful assumption to advance our theoretical understanding of flexible bureaucracies is the pluralistic frame of reference, which views organizations as coalitions of divergent interests and perspectives that must somehow cohere and align (Fox, 1966).

3.3.3 Holacracy as an Example of Pluralistic Bureaucracy

We draw on a case study of holacracy to develop a novel framework for pluralistic bureaucracy. Self-organizing and rule-based, holacracy is an organization-level system that centers on teams that autonomously make decisions about organizing and governing their work while maintaining alignment within a nested hierarchy of purpose (Bernstein, Bunch, Canner, & Lee, 2016). Formal adoption of holacracy starts with the organizational ratification of a written constitution, which outlines structure and processes. Managing in holacracy happens primarily in teams, referred to as “circles,” which control and regulate a domain within the company and define policies that either grant or limit authority within the domain. In Figure 3.1, the anchor circle represents the entire organization, and the web circle and database administration circle are subcircles within it. Employees hold various roles within the circles. The key activity of a circle is to identify and resolve gaps or tensions between the domain’s existing state and the desired state. Decisions in circles are made in tactical meetings to resolve project-related and triaging issues, and in governance meetings to address areas related to policy, structure, and the selection of people into defined, distributed leadership roles.

Figure 3.1 Illustrative Depiction of Holacracy Circles



Brian Robertson created and trademarked the concept of holacracy in 2007 (Robertson, 2015), yet it is historically connected to sociocracy, a term developed by August Comte, and to efforts by Dutch educator Kees Boeke in the 1920s to involve children in decisions about their own curriculum. In the 1960s, Gerard Endenberg, a Dutch entrepreneur and student of Boeke, developed the Sociocratic Circle Organization Method (SCM), which contains many features of holacracy (Eckstein & Buck, 2018; Romme, 1997; Romme, 2015). Holacracy as a term derives from the idea of the holon, which means "whole" in Greek and is simultaneously a whole and a part (Robertson, 2015). Holacracy includes strong reliance on formal elements such as a written constitution and worker roles, which are both constantly adapted; technology-based transparency (Bernstein, 2017), which makes information available to everyone; and reliance on hierarchical circles governed by purposes that are the basic cells where work is organized and performed, and where accountability for work resides. The organizational structure is flexible and is autonomously updated at the circle level. At the same time, the informal structure matters a lot in holacracy. Holacracy relies on teams rather than managers to make autonomous decisions about how to organize and govern work, including task allocation and task distribution (Puranam, Alexy, & Reitzig, 2014;

Tata & Prasad, 2004; Wageman, 1997). Motivation for collaboration (Puranam et al., 2014) is driven by intrinsic incentives, related to community belonging, shared purpose, and psychological ownership, which are common motivators as well in other pluralist organizations (Druskat & Pescosolido, 2002; Kirkman & Rosen, 1999). The high level of autonomy allows circles to adapt to changes in the environment without relying on a slow chain of command.

In the holacracy model, individuals and groups act autonomously, with the condition that they adhere to the constitution. Holacracy members decide how to act in a given situation, and regulate compliance with self-created standards. Each circle is responsible for setting up and enforcing its own policies in its domain, and has the responsibility of identifying and resolving tensions within. While managing is decentralized by design, as decisions are made in distributed circles, managing is also centralized in the sense that the anchor circle encompassing the organization's purpose creates all of the first-level sub-circles, sets their purposes, and chooses one of its four leadership representatives (the lead link; the sub-circle itself elects the others). Tensions across circles at any level are governed by rules that are similar to those for tensions within circles, which are analyzed in detail below. Ultimately, the anchor circle retains the right to create and disband its own sub-circles, which may be useful in important strategic decisions.

Holacracy in its organizational design may be one of those "innovative organization structures that satisfy contradictory constraints" (Dean, Yoon and Susman, 1992: 222). It is centralized and decentralized, hierarchical and distributed. Like self-managed teams (Hamel, 2011; Manz, 1986; Nan & Lu, 2014), or organizations with shared leadership (Carson, Tesluk, & Marrone, 2007; Pearce, Wassenaar, & Manz, 2014), it places strong emphasis on informal processes that facilitate emergent patterns of behavior, but it relies also on a robust formal system, including a constitution and multiple rules, policies, and procedures. Because of its strong formal component that allows holacracy to scale in size, we classify holacracy as a bureaucracy. But unlike traditional bureaucracies, holacracy minimizes the role of formal managers. Managing is subsumed into employee roles that are carefully scripted and are not the responsibility of particular individuals simply based on hierarchical position.

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN, DATA, AND METHODS

3.4.1 Research Setting

To build new theory based on our research aim, we conducted an intensive study of a single case with the purpose of generalizing theory from description (Gerring, 2007). Because U.S. government agencies are typically heavily bureaucratic in the traditional unitary sense of managerial hierarchy, implementing such a radical organizational system as holacracy in this context represents an extreme, revelatory case for research (Yin, 2014) and an ideal context for studying pluralistic bureaucracy. It is unusual that a government organization would attempt such a novel organizational system, and also rare to be granted extensive research access to this organization for an empirical study. Given the extreme shift that a government agency would have to make in order to adopt a pluralistic organizational system, we found the situation so remarkable that we regarded it as a "talking pig" (Siggelkow, 2007), an extraordinary case yielding unique insights that would be unlikely to be gleaned from smaller or less traditional organizations attempting the same holacracy adoption. We gathered data in our field study (Watson, 2011) from multiple sources through the implementation of holacracy at IT-GOV, a U.S. government agency providing information technology services: 1) participant observation, based on which our field notes were written, 2) interviews with our informants, and 3) archival data, including documents, emails, and access to web repositories and software tools. The deputy CIO, the principal driver of holacracy at IT-GOV, gave our lead researcher insider access to the research site and its participants. We use pseudonyms for the organization and individual subjects.

Contextual background. The purpose of IT-GOV was to provide information technology to all the other agencies (their customers) in the state; from computer networking and telephony, to websites and video services. The U.S. state government has been subject to destabilizing financial and debt crises for decades, which have undermined its promise of offering employees a "job for life" in exchange for below-market-rate salaries. This change has proven particularly difficult for state agencies who specialize in information technology (IT), placing them in direct competition for workers with the private software industry. In addition, millennial workers are less likely than previous generations to work for the government, and thus the median age of government workers is increasing and the government workforce is not replenishing itself (Guay, 2018). Accordingly, the state government faces a "silver tsunami," where it is anticipated that as Baby Boomers retire in large numbers, job vacancies and experience gaps will be created that will be difficult to fill (Lewis & Cho, 2011).

Workplace of choice. This silver tsunami explains in part why IT-GOV was motivated to try a radical approach. The adoption of an organizational practice associated with innovators in the software industry aimed at becoming a "workplace of choice," increasing IT-GOV's attractiveness to younger, skilled IT workers, who would otherwise work at nearby offices of big private-sector technology firms (e.g., Microsoft) for much higher salaries and enviable perks.

First, the deputy CIO attempted holacracy within his small office. Next, he gathered support to scale holacracy at IT-GOV. He made presentations to IT-GOV executives and at local and national conferences, posing questions such as "Can evolving past the hierarchy make us more efficient?" and "How can IT-GOV be a relevant employer that attracts the next generation of top talent?" He asserted that operational accountability could be achieved through the teams' ongoing review of operational metrics, and further explained how management would not disappear, but be distributed across multiple roles (see Figure 3.2). He proposed an experiment involving the implementation of holacracy in which half of the employees agreed to participate. Our lead researcher joined the organization as it was starting holacracy.

Figure 3.2 Presentation to IT-GOV executives about distributing former manager's tasks through roles

3.4.2 Data Collection

The lead researcher worked at IT-GOV in the holacracy organization for six months in the first year, and visited twice in the next two years, for three and six weeks, respectively. She conducted 51 semi-structured interviews with 29 individuals and two group interviews during Years 3-5 of the holacracy transition, observed or participated in 69 meetings, and had numerous informal interactions on site, during meetings, between meetings, and through social activities.

To preserve anonymity on the team level, we have documented and provided characteristics of three main categories of team specialization: software, services, and IT (see Table 3.1). The people interviewed included a diversity of ethnicity, gender, and experience, both technical and non-technical, with approximately one third former managers and two thirds former subordinates across seven teams (see Table 3.2). Each interview was recorded and transcribed, and lasted between 30-120 minutes. While building relationships, initial meetings were simply observed with notes taken immediately afterwards to capture the details. After two months, when trust was established, the lead researcher began taking a laptop to meetings and capturing discussions by typing detailed notes in real time.

Table 3.1 IT-GOV Team Categories and Characteristics

Team Specialization	Software	Services	IT
Activity	Developing new applications for customers	Management and administration of applications, customer relations	Hardware support
Number of Teams	6	5	3
Examples of Roles	Cloud Advocate Data Architect Data Visualization Developer Database Security Guardian Engineering jack-of-all-trades Integration Developer Mainframe Liaison Manual Process Runner Monitoring Wizard R&D Visionary Systems Analyst Ticket Triager	Budget Master Bug Finder Business Process Analyzer Communication Pioneer Customer Advocate Financial Guru Incident Response Coordinator Licensing Sage Projects Lifeguard Promotional Event Coordinator Requirements Gatherer	Circuit Minion Equipment Manager Network Architect Network Capacity Planning Network Engineer OSS Overlord SMON Engineer Support Technician Warranty Warlord Workflow Warrior

Table 3.2 Interview Matrix

Team	Specialization	Former Manager	Former Subordinate	Male	Female	White	Ethnic Minority	Interview Frequency
1	Software	1	4	3	2	3	2	Member1 (Years 3, 4, 5) Member2 (Years 3, 4, 5) Member3 (Years 3, 4 (2x), 5) Member5 (Years 4, 5) Member6 (Year 5)
2	Services	2	5	3	4	7	0	Member1 (Years 3, 5) Member2 (Years 3, 5) Member3 (Years 3, 4, 5) Member4 (Year 3) Member5 (Year 3) Member6 (Year 3) Member7 (Year 3)
3	Software	2	0	1	1	1	1	Member2 (Years 3, 4, 5) Member3 (Years 4, 5)
4	IT	1	3	1	3	2	2	Member1 (Year 3) Member2 (Year 3) Member3 (Years 3, 4, 5) Member4 (Year 3)
5	IT	0	1	1	0	0	1	Member 1 (Year 3)
6	IT	1	1	1	1	2	0	Member 1 (Years 3, 4, 5) Member 2 (Years 3 (2x), 4)
7	Services	0	3	0	3	2	1	Member1 (Year 5) Member2 (Years 4, 5) Member3 (Year 5)
Team Totals		*7*	*17*	*10*	*14*	*17*	*7*	
Other	external holacracy coaches (4 in Year 3), IT-GOV executive (1 in Year 5), group interviews (2 in Year 5)							

Holacracy was adopted by fourteen teams or circles at IT-GOV, a total of one-fourth of the 500-person organization. Table 3.3 presents the event chronology and details of data collection associated with the implementation of holacracy at IT-GOV. We observed meetings of all fourteen circles between 1-9 times, depending on the relevance of the content for our study and the level of engagement of each group. Team size was typically 5-8 people, with two larger teams of 11-12. The 69 meeting observations included tactical and governance meetings of the fourteen circles (see Table 3.4). Tactical meetings were focused on tasks, issues, and status, while governance meetings involved adopting changes to roles and policy. We used purposeful sampling of all informants to glean information relevant to mechanisms of organizing, constantly comparing our data across circles (Charmaz, 2006).

Table 3.3 Timeline of Events in IT-GOV's conversion to holacracy

Year 1	
Deputy CIO is assigned the task of transforming the organization to make it more attractive to IT workers	Informant interview transcripts
IT agencies form 'Employer of Choice' committee	Informant interview transcripts
Year 2	
Deputy CIO takes holacracy practitioner training	Informant interview transcripts
Deputy CIO begins experimenting with holacracy with his small team	Informant interview transcripts
Year 3	
Deputy CIO conceives of plan to adopt holacracy in larger agency	Archival records and informant interview transcripts
Deputy CIO promotes holacracy as agency experiment	Archival records and informant interview transcripts
Deputy CIO identifies team participants	Archival records and informant interview transcripts
Employees receive training in holacracy	Archival records and interview transcripts
Year 4	
Employees practice holacracy with external coaching	Archival records and interview transcripts
Participant observation begins	Field notes
Main interviews begin	Interview transcripts
Employees practice holacracy independently with internal peer coaching	Archival records, field notes and interview transcripts
Year 5	
Experiment ends, employees continue practicing holacracy	Archival records, field notes and interview transcripts

Table 3.4 Meeting Observations and Types

Team	Specialization	Tactical	Governance	Hybrid (Tactical and Governance)
Team1	Software	6	1	1
Team2	Services	3	2	2
Team3	Software	5	0	1
Team4	IT	4	2	0
Team5	IT	5	1	1
Team6	IT	5	3	1
Team7	Services	1	2	0
Team8	Services	2	2	0
Team9	Services	2	1	0
Team10	Services	1	0	0
Team11	Software	0	0	2
Team12	Software	4	2	0
Team13	IT	2	2	0
Team14	Software	0	0	3
Totals		*40*	*18*	*11*

We iteratively collected and analyzed data through daily and weekly field notes, and sought new data through interviews and subsequent participant observation based on the data from previous contacts. We used the primary findings to develop first-order categories as the first incremental step in building theory from data (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013).

3.4.3 Analytical Methods

We engaged in inductive theory building and followed the principle of emergence (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), where, through systematized data gathering and processing, some concepts stood out as relevant for further consideration. For instance, we noticed early in our research the importance of each person's voice in holacracy. We began identifying key concepts related to the dimensions of holacracy in our data and organizing them into first-order categories through open coding, using in-vivo codes or simple descriptions based on the language of our informants and in the data (Charmaz, 2006).

As an example of open coding of individual voice, we documented how all participants in governance meeting, within the formalized meeting process, were given opportunities to react or object to proposals. We coded transcripts of the interviews line-by-line in ATLAS.ti to detect emerging themes, scaling up to a higher level of abstraction to build a theoretical model with potential generalizability to other related contexts. Line-by-line coding captured descriptions, actions, and opinions, focusing on the types of experiences employees had. From this first-order coding, we looked for relationships emerging between categories in order to aggregate them into second-order themes, thus moving to selective coding as we identified core concepts (Gioia et al., 2013). For example, two other first-order codes we identified for individual voice included the practice of rotating leadership and elections observed in meetings, and data from interviews where people expressed feeling like they had focused time and attention for their issues at meetings. Because of her previous experience as a practitioner in similar contexts to the research site, the lead researcher drew upon ethnographic reflexivity and an *a priori* cognitive framework to inform the research by allowing for more accurate interpretation of data (Davies, 2008; Van de Ven, 2007: 39).

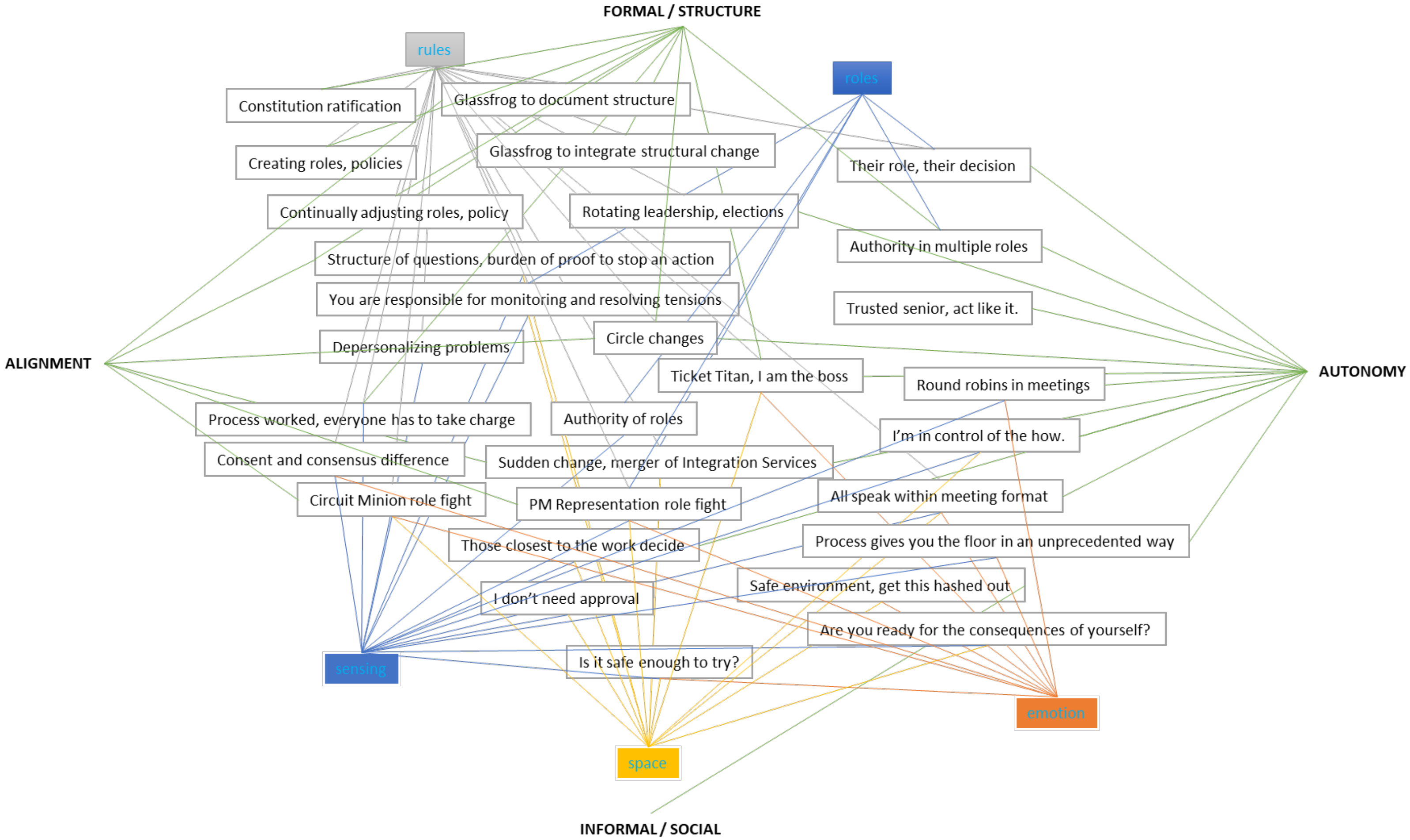
The first-order categories formed the basis for the development of more abstract second-order themes that were later grouped into aggregate dimensions and tied to extant literature at the late stage of theoretical integration (Gioia et al., 2013). For instance, in addition to the idea of individual voice, we also found related ideas of putting authority into roles and a shift in the mental model of employees. During this iterative process of going back and forth between data collection and analysis, memos provided the basis in which insights from data were compared with the literature. Further, the emerging theoretical concepts influenced the choice of themes to focus on during the observations, and questions to ask informants later. For example, when we identified the theme of shift in the mental model of employees, this resulted in a deepened focus on this topic in subsequent interviews and evolved into the idea of brewing a culture of independent thinking.

As we refined, shaped, and identified the boundaries of concepts, we then transitioned to theoretical sampling, where researcher perspective and emerging theoretical insights guided further data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2006), leading to new questions for interviews and the emergence of new themes. During this research period, we engaged in constant comparisons between coded interviews, observation, and archival fragments to ensure coherence; then, we reviewed mechanisms and mechanism dimensions, ensuring that dimensions within a mechanism were closely related, and that each concept was distinct from other concepts. For instance, over time we assessed that the second-order themes of emphasizing individual voice, pushing decisions into roles, and brewing a culture of independent thinking were closely related to autonomy yet distinct from each other, and eventually bundled them into the mechanism of codifying freedom. We followed the model of concepts resting on empirical indications (Charmaz, 2006). As an example of the constant comparison technique, we identified, at an early phase of analysis, the dimensions of "encouraging dispute" and "voicing tensions" within the mechanism of normalizing disagreement. Based on further interviews and co-author discussion, these dimensions were modified to become "encouraging inquiry" and "sensing tensions," with the latter dimension joining the mechanism of systematizing change for increased accuracy in data analysis and better conceptual clarity.

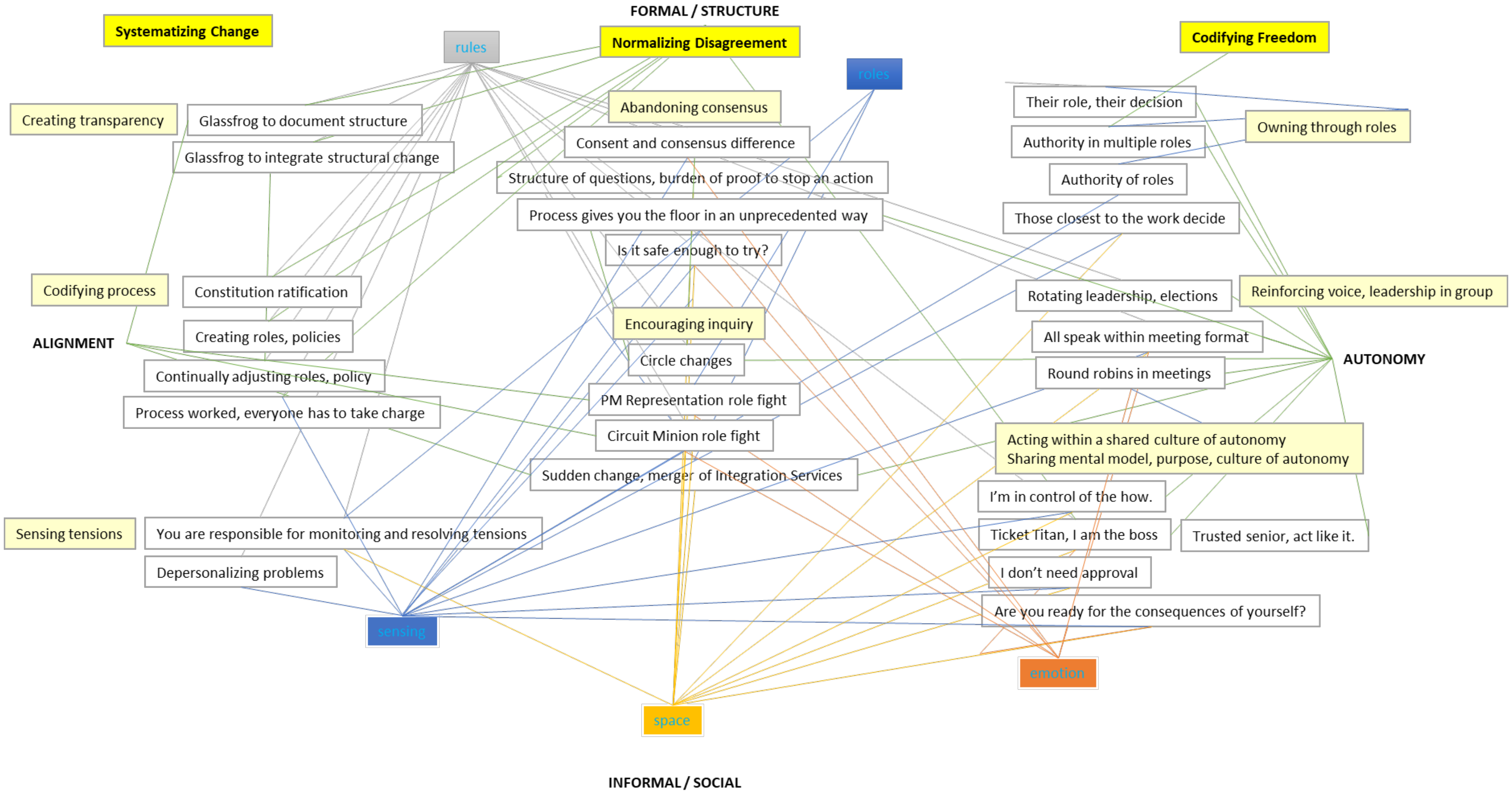
Through this iterative process, we continued to observe and interview until we were no longer finding new concepts or new connections between concepts as we integrated new data. We arrived at the concept of pluralistic bureaucracy as the basis of our framing and acknowledged the importance of analyzing formal and informal elements, which triggered recoding of all data and refined our theoretical model (see Figure 3.3 for the sequence of analysis). Finally, we integrated the concepts into a theoretical model (Gioia et al., 2013) to develop a grounded theory of pluralistic bureaucracy. Figure 3.4 illustrates the core concepts and their relationships, and orders and structures the overall findings, with Table 3.5 containing representative quotes and data.

Figure 3.3 Mapping of Recoding and Analysis

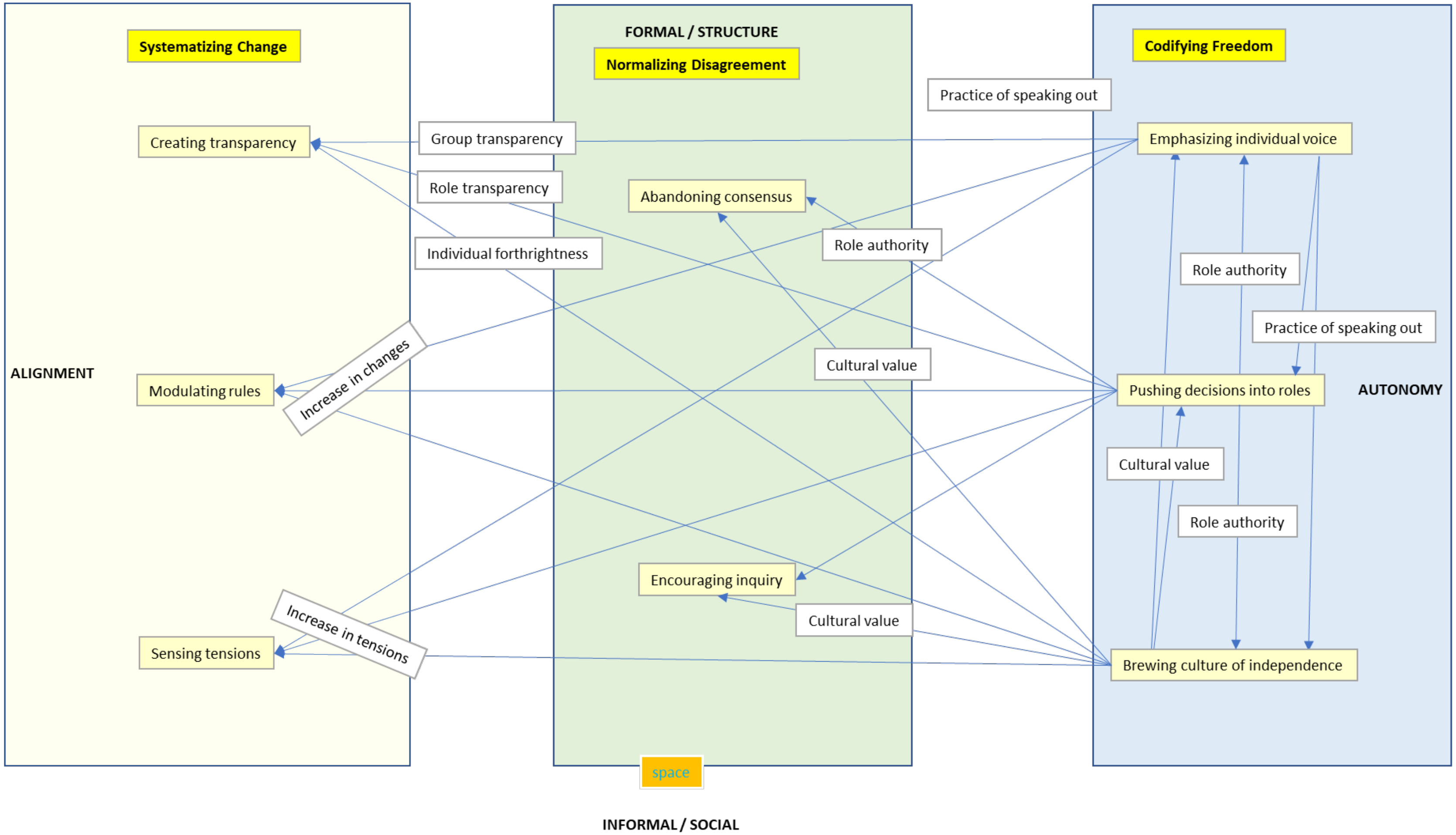
a. Initial Recoding



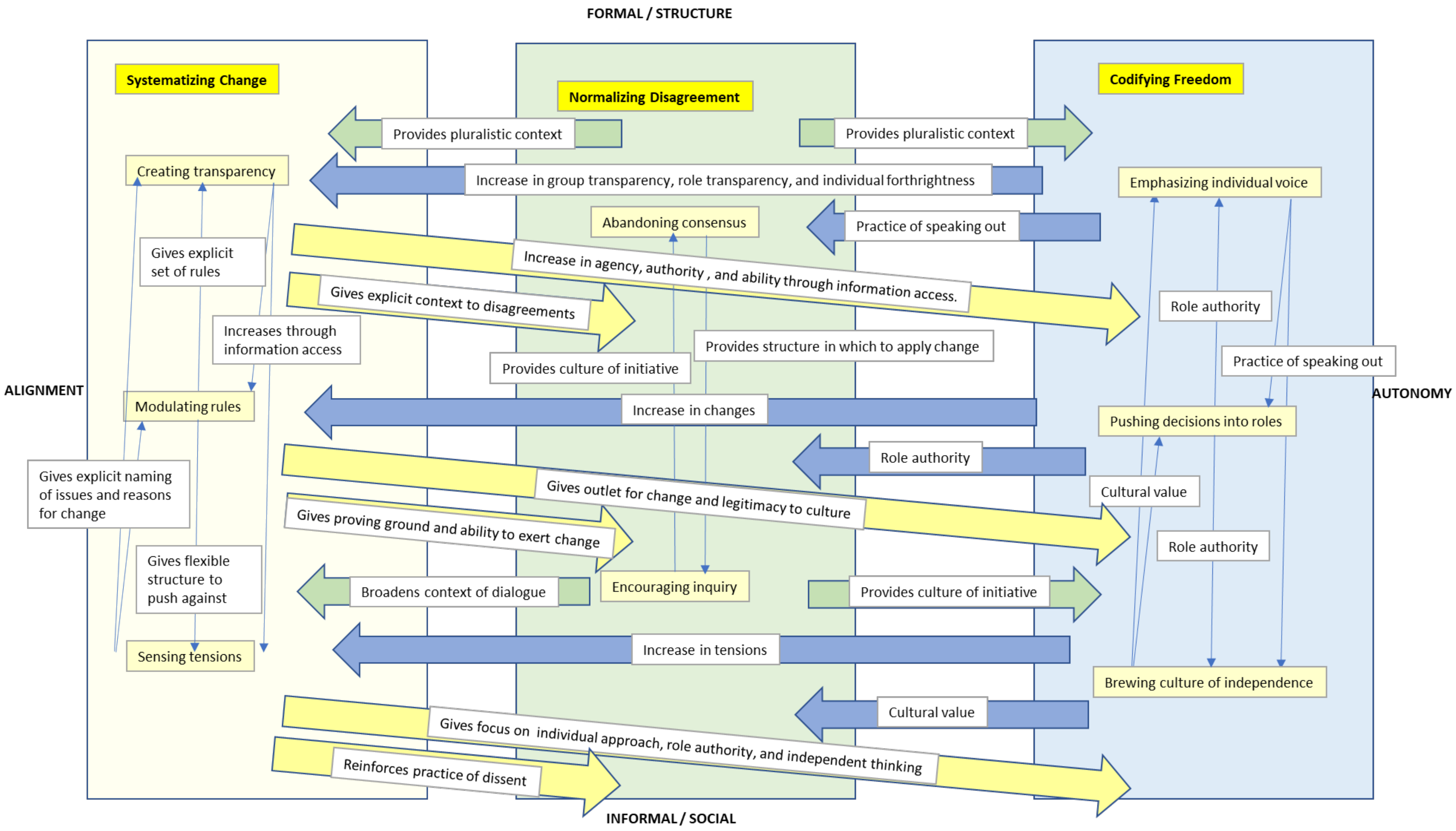
b. Recoding with Second- and Third-Order Concepts



c. Initial Interrelationships Between Concepts



d. Iterated Interrelationships Between Concepts



e. Interrelationships Coded for Formality and Informality

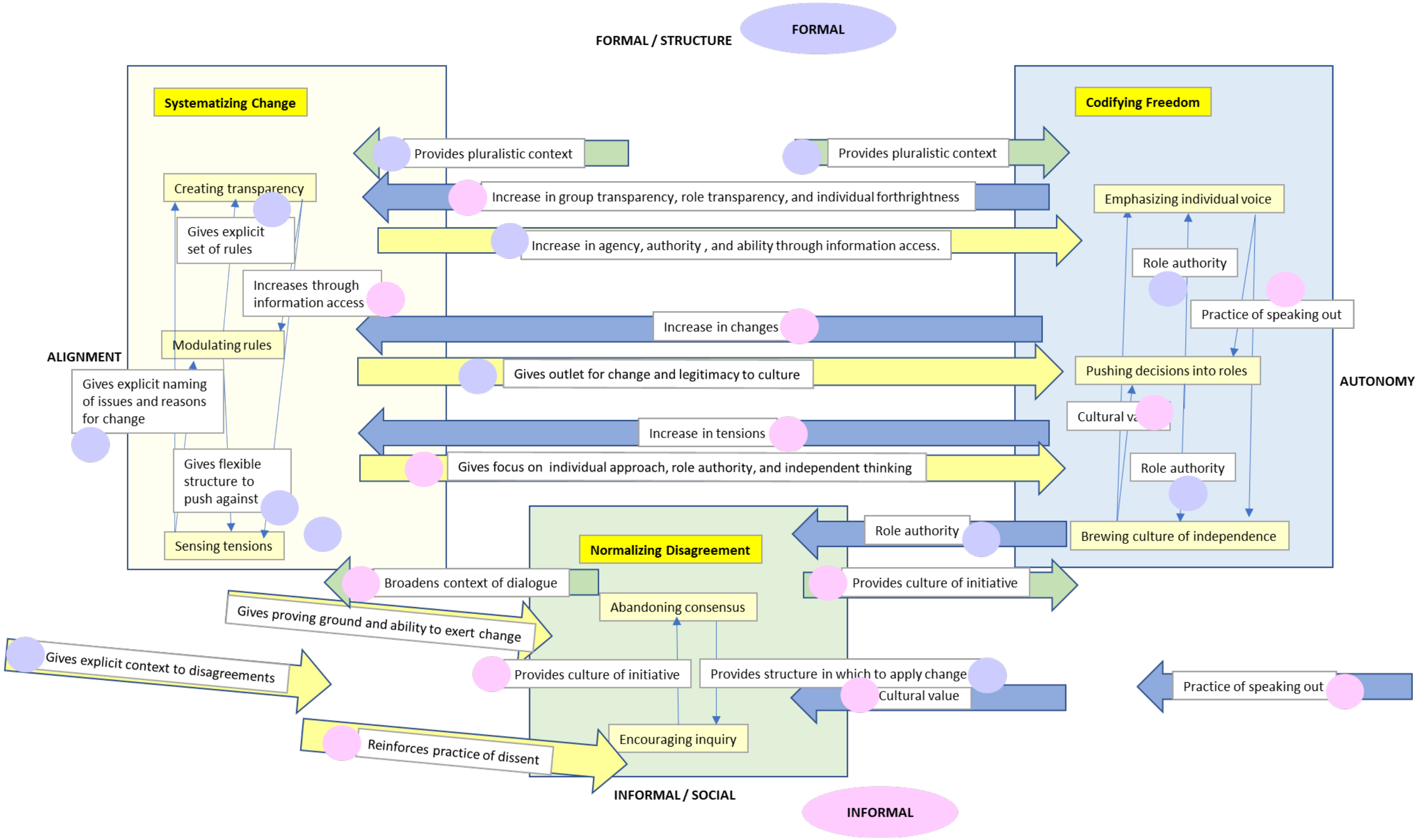


Figure 3.4 Key Concepts and Relationships

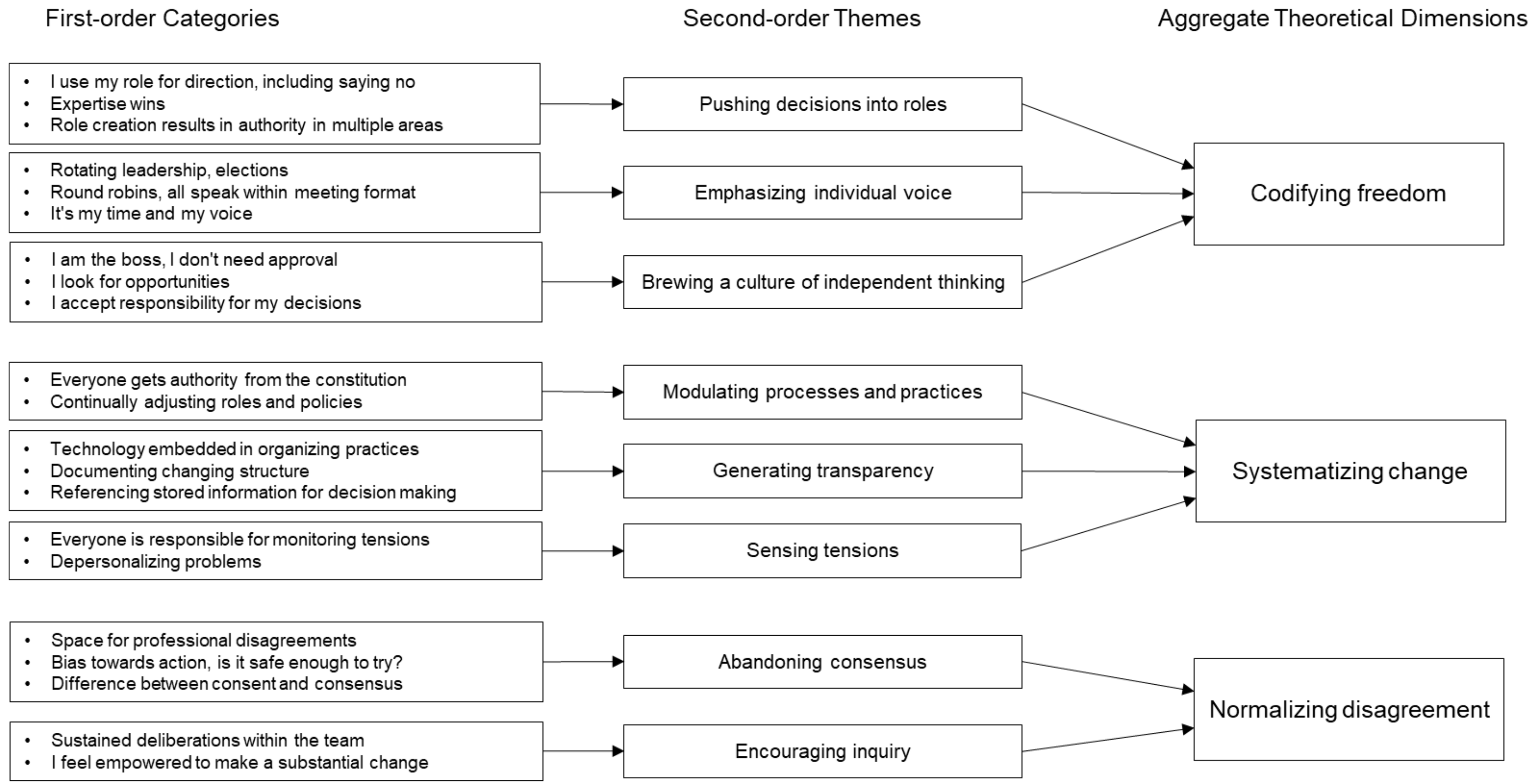


Table 3.5

Representative Quotes, Observations, and Archival Records Demonstrating First-order Categories and Second-order Themes	
CODIFYING FREEDOM	
3.5.1 Pushing decisions into roles	
I use my role for direction, including saying no	"I looked at the work in terms of role like, 'What role I'm speaking up or what role I'm approaching this from,' because then it helped me define and remind me what my goal was and what I needed to do. It allowed me to focus from a role perspective." (Team ^{7}Member^{3}) "[Employees] know that it's their role, it's their decision. The whole structure of holacracy gives them the ability to say, I don't want to do what you suggested. It makes the people receiving information [about a task or idea] more comfortable. Like they're not going to offend me or anything because I know it's not my role, and you don't have to listen to me." (Team^{2}Member^{3})
Expertise wins	"The respect for the staff is there and you rely on their expertise and you trust their expertise. They're absolutely accountable." (Team^{3}Member^{2}, former manager) "They actually know more than I do. 'You're a trusted senior level technical person. Act like it.' " (Team^{6}Member^{2}, former manager)
Role creation results in authority in multiple areas	Researcher observations: In the previous hierarchy at IT-GOV, the job title of Team^{1}Member^{2} was Solutions Architect. In Year 4, she held nine different roles, including Circle Secretary, Brand Steward, Culture Coach, and Evangelist. Each of these roles empowered Team^{1}Member^{2} to do different things.
3.5.2 Emphasizing individual voice	
Rotating leadership, elections	Researcher observations: Each team at IT-GOV had six-month elections for two roles, Facilitator, who runs the meetings, and Secretary, who records the meetings and has the final say regarding interpretation of rules. These elections and their processes were inscribed in the holacracy constitution that IT-GOV adopted. During the study period, we observed nine elections in Teams 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6. In eight out of nine elections, different people (former subordinates) were elected, and out of those eight, three were relatively new to the teams. In all nine elections, the person elected had never held the role before.
Round robins, all speak within meeting format	Researcher observations about typical meeting process: Each person spoke during standard check-in and closing rounds, reflecting on their current state of mind and how they felt the meeting went. All would participate in the checklist review, stating whether they had completed weekly tasks agreed by the circle. People would take turns reporting project updates and raising tensions about something that could be improved upon, usually from the perspective of their roles.

It’s my time and my voice	“You actually give them a moment where they have the right. It’s their time, and they’re protected from judgment, they’re protected from interference. And they realize, ‘Oh, it’s my time, I have a voice.’ ” (Team[1]Member[2]) “I like that each person is asked [as part of formal meeting process] if they have any objections and why. Gives them an opportunity to really, really speak to what they’re thinking and feeling. And so at that point it doesn’t really matter what your role is, it’s easy to bring up and have that time to actually talk about it.” (Team[2]Member[6])
3.5.3 Brewing a culture of independent thinking	
I am the boss, I don’t need approval	“Then she [lead link] turns around and asked me, ‘Are you asking my permission?’ Then it would make me think, ‘Oh wait. I don’t need to ask for permission.’ I wasn’t the only one, it was funny. Then after a while, before I approached her, I would say, ‘What am I seeking? Am I seeking an approval? Because I already have it, I don’t need approval. I just go doing my job.’ It’s that piece took me a while. I think a lot of people would agree with that.” (Team[7]Member[3])
I look for opportunities	Researcher observations: At a Team 7 meeting, a member proposed that a ‘project coordinator’ role be added with the following purpose: “Synchronize work efforts between internal and external stakeholders on a project where no project manager is assigned.” He expressed that he was already acting in this role for the group by scheduling resources. As the circle members asked clarifying questions, he explained that this role was different from projects with a project manager because “some of it is size of project, they’re smaller, or they [the project managers] don’t have the resources, and I like to get experience.”
I accept responsibility for my decisions	“It [moving to holacracy] really freaked me out because I’m used to that buffer in a hierarchy. More used to the buffer of getting permission, because then you know that you’ve got cover. In a holacracy, you don’t know if you have cover or you don’t feel like you have cover because you feel slightly on your own. It’s just weird to make that decision on your own and accept that you made that decision, and you’re going to have to be responsible. So you’re in a way more careful. Because now you’re going to take this bold step. Are you ready for the consequences of yourself? It’s a very personal responsibility.” (Team[1]Member[2])
SYSTEMATIZING CHANGE	
3.5.4 Sensing tensions	
Everyone is responsible for monitoring tensions	From the Holacracy Constitution: “Section 1.2.1 Processing Tensions You are responsible for monitoring how your Role’s Purpose and Accountabilities are expressed, and comparing that to your vision of their ideal potential expression, to identify gaps between the current reality and a potential you sense (each gap is a ‘Tension’). You are also responsible for trying to resolve those Tensions by using the authorities and other mechanisms available to you under this Constitution.” “I think the process worked. Governance meetings require work ahead of time on behalf of everyone. You have to take a timeout before the meeting to clearly define what your tension is and the proposal that you want to bring to the group. It’s a little bit tough to get into that process of remembering that you have to prepare for these meetings.” (Team[6]Member[1] as facilitator, advising her team in the closing round of a challenging meeting)

Depersonalizing problems	"When you understand the holacracy definition of a tension as being sort of a gap, it takes that first step in depersonalizing the problems. There's a gap that could be filled here and it's not 'You caused this problem.' They are not finger pointing. It's about, 'Hey, I'm seeing this. Let's talk about how we solve it.' (Team[1]Member[1])
3.5.5 Modulating processes and practices	
Everyone gets authority through the constitution	"As a leader, you essentially give up your authority and put your authority into this document and then everyone gets their authority from this document, including you. There's this whole one-page thing you sign as a leader. And it basically says I give all my authority to the constitution. So I signed it." (Team[1]Member[3])
Continually adjusting roles, policies	From IT-GOV's archival records in Glassfrog software: In Year 5, during a four-month period, Team 1 made changes to its roles and policies: March: 1) Changed role: Purchasing and Invoicing Gatekeeper 2) Added role: Training Coordinator April: 3) Created sub-circles: Workforce Analytics and Business Automation 4) Removed accountability from role: Culture Coach 5) Added role: Onboarding Buddy June: 6) Added accountabilities to sub-circles: Web and Business Automation 7) Added policy for role: Service Champion
3.5.6 Generating transparency	
Technology embedded in organizing practices	Governance meeting synopsis: 1. Circle members enter meeting room with laptops 2. Secretary logs into Glassfrog, projects it on to screen 3. Secretary opens meeting in Glassfrog 4. Facilitator motions to build the agenda inside of Glassfrog 5. Circle members add agenda items through their laptops, which appear on the screen 6. Facilitator calls on member to present proposal of a new role creation 7. Secretary records draft in Glassfrog 8. Proposer asks secretary to navigate across Glassfrog to check another role's accountabilities 9. Facilitator takes group through proposal process, which is accepted 10. Secretary records final decision in Glassfrog 11. New role appears on role list on Glassfrog, is also accessible through Governance History page, and through a general web search by anyone in the organization 12. (after meeting) Lead Link assigns new role to circle member in Glassfrog
Documenting changing structure	"Having Glassfrog [software], something that records [decisions], was incredibly important. Because things before would be agreed to in a meeting, but never really documented. Or if it was documented, it was documented in meeting notes that gets filed away and nobody ever looks at it again. So going back and trying to find that one meeting note, assuming it was even created, that stipulated what we had agreed upon, was non-existent. Now we build the roles and build the policies, and you have a recording that you open up every single time [you have a meeting]." (Team[6]Member[1])

Referencing stored information for decision making	Researcher observations: At meetings, we observed Teams 1 and 7 using Glassfrog to review their bank of roles when deciding where a new workstream should be placed. During this review, sometimes they decided it belongs to an existing role and make a request of the role holder to accept a task or project. Other times, after the Glassfrog review, they decided that a new role should be created to capture the workstream. Then they consulted Glassfrog again to assess boundaries between existing roles and this new role to ensure there was no redundancy or conflict.
NORMALIZING DISAGREEMENT	
3.5.7 Abandoning consensus	
Space for professional disagreements	"My current lead link [former manager] has different opinions than me on some things, and that's fine. In fact, holacracy gives me the space to have professional disagreements and feel like that's OK. And realize that it's not a betrayal or something like that. It's just [that] I feel differently. I'm in control of the how. I can actually say, I really feel strongly the other way, and so at this point, this is what I'm going to do. I don't necessarily think it makes her feel comfortable, because, you know, she's used to her hierarchical management. But at the same time, that's where it kind of ends." (Team[2]Member[7])
Bias towards action, is it safe enough to try?	"[Holacracy] causes change without team buy-in, under the heading of 'is it safe enough to try?' When I feel myself getting particularly attached to my own opinion, I will sit back, and I'll say, 'Okay, is there any actual damage that is going to be caused by this?' And I find myself letting go." (Team[6]Member[1])
Difference between consent and consensus	"The structure of the questions and answers in the meetings is such that it's really putting the burden of proof on someone [who wants] to stop an action. It's not enough to just dig in your heels. There's actually burden of proof on them to show how this is going to cause some harm. The burden of proof is no longer, 'Prove you have a good enough idea to go forward,' it's 'Prove that there's a big enough risk to not do it.' " (Team[1]Member[1])
3.5.8 Encouraging inquiry	
Sustained deliberations within the team	From field notes on the Team 6 governance meeting, March 2, Year 4: Stan has added an item to the agenda proposing a new accountability for the role of Circuit Minion. Kyle objects because he says the proposal is not adequately worded. Mia, the Facilitator overrules the objection: the proposal being poorly written is not sufficient to object to it. But she tells Kyle he can raise a tension about this after this proposal process completes if he desires. Next, Rick objects because the proposal as written requires people outside the circle to do something, which he says is "not in the purview of [the circle] to make this requirement." The Facilitator asks Jack as Secretary who confirms this is a valid objection. This triggers an integration round, and the Facilitator asks Rick to make a counter proposal that would address his objection, which he does. Kyle makes a second objection, this time because the new wording would "hold Circuit Minions responsible for something we're not accountable for." The Facilitator leads Kyle and Stan, the original proposer, through an additional integration round, which resolves the final objection, and the proposal passes.

I feel empowered to make a substantial change	From field notes on the Team 8 governance meeting, November 8, Year 4: They added a new role called PM [project manager] Representation. John fought for it. Emma, the lead link (his former manager), tried to shut it down. The project management team does not seem to support the business analysts (like John), but then criticizes them for not involving project managers on tasks that have grown into projects. John has felt the negative effects of this, and wants someone on PM team to come to their meetings so they can have visibility into what is happening. This would fill the gap. John articulates what he wants: the PM Representation role. The governance process took hold - clarifying question round, reaction round, objection round. Emma said she objected because there was no way she could get the PM team to agree to come to the meetings. But the facilitator determines that this is not a valid objection. Emma seemed visibly upset, while John said he felt good because 'finally I feel empowered to do something about something that is needed in order to fulfill my job properly.' From researcher's memo in Year 4: "Mark filled me in on the merger of Integration Services into Data Management. Sounds like a lot shifted quickly. Claire became more of a leader. She spoke up on behalf of her team that they wanted to merge with Data Management. Mark thought it was funny that at the beginning of the meeting, he was asked and replied that he wasn't aware of any future org changes, but in the midst of that meeting, Claire and others ended up discussing and executing an org change. He said it was great to see the surprised look on the faces of the Data Management team at their meeting a few hours later."

In addition to inductive theory building, as part of ensuring consistency in our interpretations (Guba, 1981), we conducted within-case analysis of two out of the fourteen teams at IT-GOV to assess our emergent model and to identify patterns through comparison. The two teams were chosen because they were 1) active in their practice of holacracy throughout our study period and 2) perceived to be the top and bottom performers in their maturity of the practice, both anecdotally and through a rubric-based statistical analysis conducted by the organization. Accordingly, we have included a circle comparison in our findings.

3.4.4 Ensuring trustworthiness

The lead author's embedded role at the organization provided rare access to the inner workings of the organization, but also introduced bias, because some data were gathered through conversations that included researcher and informant interpretations.

For rigor, we took this dynamic into consideration and strove to keep this transparent in our analysis. Following research exemplars, we undertook a number of steps to ensure trustworthiness (Anney, 2014; Gioia, Price, Hamilton, & Thomas, 2010; Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Wallendorf & Belk, 1989), which we detail in Table 3.6:

Table 3.6 Steps to Ensure Trustworthiness

Criteria	Step to Ensure Trustworthiness
Truth value concern How can a researcher establish confidence in his/her findings? Or how do we know if the findings presented are genuine?	We researched on site for months at a time, over the course of three years, which gave us both proximity to the subject and distance to reflect and discern the accuracy of the findings. We recorded interviews whenever possible, and made sure to keep the rigor of daily field notes, to increase the precision of our data collection efforts. We chose quotes in our findings that were either from our key informant and thus unique, or that were corroborated by multiple informants across our sample. We had access to multiple types of data for a long period of time. Whenever possible, we interviewed multiple members of each circle and triangulated information between informants and archival data for better reliability.
Applicability concern How do we know or determine the applicability of the findings of the inquiry in other settings or with other respondents?	After completing six months of field work, the lead researcher revisited the site twice in two subsequent years. During these visits, she conducted respondent validation of the model that had emerged through inductive analysis, which resulted in reorienting the model components and renaming two of its dimensions. We also sought feedback from external informants at a second organization practicing holacracy and a third organization practicing radical self-management (non-holacracy), both of which are mid-size organizations. Each of these external practitioners stated that the emergent theory also matched their own experiences working at their own companies, suggesting that the components of our model were critical to a working holacracy and also a pluralistic context. The practitioners provided examples where the absence of the model components would result in severe challenges.
Consistency concern How can one know if the findings would be repeated consistently with the similar	We noticed clear differentiation across the teams, and this variation gave depth and substance to our data collection and the opportunity to conduct within-case comparisons, aiding consistency for the study. Out of the fourteen

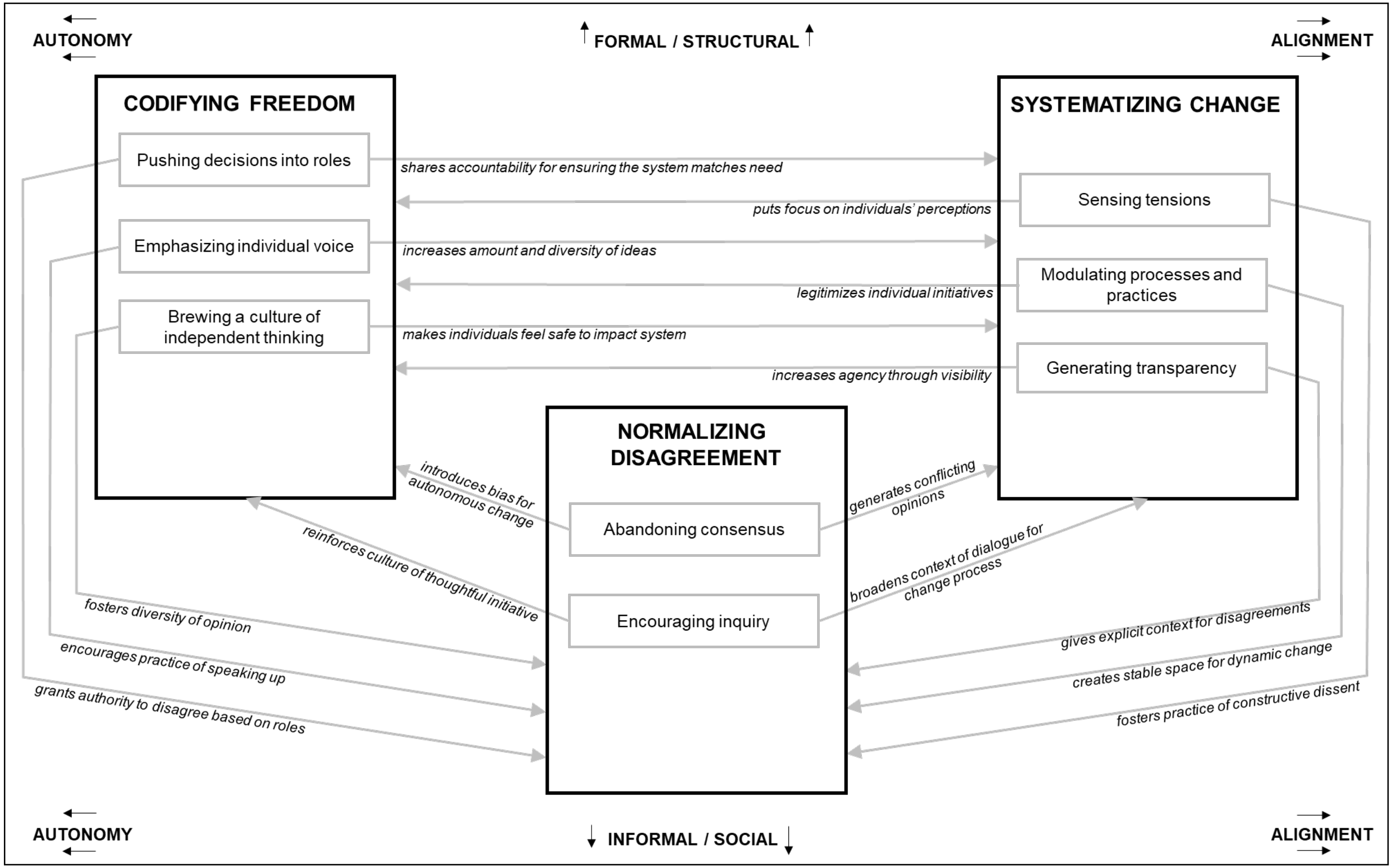
(same) participants in the same context?	circles, we observed that four successfully transformed into robustly functioning self-managing circles, where members actively employed the tools of holacracy to steer the direction of their team. Four other circles performed poorly and disbanded. And six circles remained in operation, advanced modestly, but encountered a number of problems: 1) former managers refusing to give up their hierarchical authority, 2) former subordinates still asking permission and refusing to take role-appropriate initiatives, 3) a discontent individual who disliked holacracy spoiling the effectiveness of their circle, and 4) in one circle, the rules of holacracy being weaponized by one member against another.
Neutrality concern How do we know if the findings come solely from participants and the investigation was not influenced by the bias, motivations or interests of the researchers?	Although the lead author was primarily responsible for data collection, all three authors participated in data analysis through data reviews and follow up discussions to avoid relying on only one researcher's perspective, leading to the co-authors noting gaps, questioning interpretations, and presenting alternative viewpoints for integration. All analysis was subject to respondent validation, and we made adjustments to the model repeatedly based on informant input for accuracy. The co-authors investigated bias, both for and against post-hierarchy, throughout the research process.
Integrity concern How do we know if the findings are not false information from given by the study participants?	It is impossible to ascertain absolutely whether study participants are providing false information, however, we took measures to minimize falsehoods and received several indications that our data are authentic. We made it clear to all participants that our data was gathered anonymously. We invested the time to get to know informants over three years, establishing friendships with some of them to mitigate the impersonal nature of research and maximize adherence to positive social values. We found that the informants did not seem preoccupied with how they were perceived, in some cases sharing information that was not positive about themselves. They typically also were quick to disagree with the lead author if they thought she was mistaken about something, leading her to believe their approach was authentic. Finally, because she got to know them over such a long period of time, the comfort level in her presence was such that in

	some instances it was clear the informants were oblivious that she was in the room, discussing material that could have been damaging in the hands of someone they did not trust. This openness gives indications that the information shared by the study participants was likely true.

3.5 FINDINGS

In this section we describe the core mechanisms with their key elements that drive how pluralistic bureaucracy reconciles autonomy and alignment. We use italics to indicate the relationships across the core concepts of the model, represented in Figure 3.5. We build a model of pluralistic bureaucracy incrementally through the explanation of the findings. Then, we use a comparison of two circles with different degrees of effectiveness in integrating autonomy and alignment to increase trustworthiness (i.e. consistency) of our findings and model (Guba, 1981).

Figure 3.5 Theoretical Model of Pluralistic Bureaucracy



Note: the phrases in italics are mentioned in the Findings section

3.5.1 Codifying Freedom

Codifying freedom is a primarily formal mechanism that provides rule-based grounding for autonomous decisions and activities. Autonomy is baked into a formal system of rules.

Pushing decisions into roles. First, roles defined the scope for autonomy of the employees and served as the basis for their self-directed actions. For example, our lead researcher joined IT-GOV as a participant observer and assumed two roles: Circle Watcher and Holacracy Storyteller. As a Circle Watcher, our lead researcher's purpose was "accelerating circle maturing through observation and coaching." Her accountabilities as Circle Watcher were: "1) Attending circle meetings; 2) Assessing circle performance; 3) Coaching circles outside of tactical and governance meetings; and 4) Assisting virtual coaches with coaching circles within Tactical and Governance meetings when necessary." In the role of Holacracy Storyteller, our lead researcher made note of her interviews and observations and decided what themes might be interesting to develop for blog posts to the general public. Her roles became the basis for her work and daily interactions with others. Formal roles such as these formed the basis for how employees engaged with their work and interacted with each other and their environment, including in what context they may refuse to do out-of-scope work. As an example, one facilitator reminded both his former manager and a colleague of this right:

> "I would take opportunities to remind our lead link [former manager], when she was acting from a hierarchical standpoint as opposed to from a holacratic standpoint. She'd say, [asking a former subordinate] 'OK, Support Ninja, I need you to do this and talk to this person.' And as a facilitator, I would say, 'OK, so Support Ninja, just keep in mind that while that was stated as a need, that is actually a request to you. Do you feel that that fits within your role?' " (Team^{2}Member^{7})

Second, within-role expertise won in the balance of who had the right to make decisions. Members of one team, which functioned as business analysts (BAs), told us that they were able to work autonomously, applying their expertise freely, and adopting best practices without the managerial meddling they were accustomed to, which allowed them to bring more of themselves to their work. According to one of the team members:

> "We are the ones closest to the work, and we know this. With that empowerment, there's no hierarchy telling you, 'No, you don't do that or you do this.' It's so much better for the people closest to the work to have the opportunity to fail. Trust your team to make the right decision for the work they're doing and then they can learn and self-correct from it. We started coming in at the forefront of this project and it has made a big difference to really utilize our BA processes and our framework to determine a strategy and work as a partner on the project." (Team[7]Member[2])

Third, role creation opened a path to formalize the attainment of authority in particular areas to address emerging needs (see Table 3.5.1). For example, Team[6]Member[1], one of two female team members, was recently hired into a predominantly male IT team. Within a year, she raised her authority in the team by taking the roles of Equipment Manager, Database Overlord, Facilitator, and Holacracy Coach. Of the Equipment Manager role, she said: "I like to joke that I do all the things nobody else wants to do." Though she spoke modestly, it appears that formalizing the role of Equipment Manager elevated the work of Team[6]Member[1]. Her doing "things nobody else wants to do" became more conspicuous, with a title, purpose, and accountabilities, in other words, a formal role with authority. In addition to structuring employee autonomy, pushing decisions into roles supported organizational alignment by *ensuring that the organizational system matched emerging needs* through role-based flexibility and re-aligning the system of employee accountabilities.

Emphasizing individual voice. We first noted that rotating leadership and elections, which occurred every six months at the teams' governance meetings, (see Table 3.5.2) increased opportunities for all the employees' voices to be heard. The positions of Facilitator and Secretary gave prominence, leadership, and authority within the team to those elected to them. Facilitators started and ended meetings, prioritized discussions and set the pace of group processes. Secretaries, also critical at meetings, documented proposals and registered decisions, and occasionally made decisions about rule interpretation when there was confusion or disagreement. These activities constituted leadership training for a set of employees, who had previously been plain subordinates. At the six-month mark, teams would typically elect new people from the team to each role, so that eventually, everyone on the team had cycled through these roles, giving everyone the chance to have a formalized authoritative voice on the team.

Second, standardizing meeting rituals, including call and response elements and round robins across all fourteen teams at IT-GOV, reinforced individual voice. Meeting agendas contained multiple slots where each person was expected to speak (see Table 3.5.2). When considering new and divergent ideas for governance items such as the creation or modification of roles and policies, the facilitator of the circle led the group through a protocol that included times for each and every person to contribute to the discussion. Having the space to speak without having to petition for it, and being automatically prompted to ask clarifying questions or to object to proposals, made each person feel more included and comfortable to participate actively.

Third, employees developed assertiveness to express themselves at length since they had dedicated time and voice within each meeting. It took a few weeks for our lead researcher to become accustomed to how frequently she was asked to contribute to meetings with new ideas and how much ownership she had over the discussion when she had the floor. The first time she raised an agenda item to call attention to the need for more blog post ideas, this was her experience:

> "It was a bit awkward. The process gives you the floor in an unprecedented way. You have complete control over what happens during your issue time – whether other people can talk, raise questions. You can tell them you don't want them to talk if that's what you want." After she finished speaking, there was silence. She

> realized everyone was looking at her, waiting. The facilitator explained that now it was time for her to ask the other circle members to do something so that she got what she needed. "It was this aha moment about what is going on in these meetings. I had to be nudged to own what I wanted."

Despite the assertiveness that our lead researcher had developed through years of holding management positions in practice, our lead researcher had to grow into feeling comfortable about taking all the time she needed since she was granted space and respect through this process. Through interviews, she found that other employees had similar experiences (see Table 3.5.2). In sum, emphasizing individual voice amplified autonomy in the organization by means of leadership rotations, standardized processes for speaking out, and developing employees' assertiveness in using their voice. Yet formalizing individual voice and standardizing meeting rituals also supported alignment by *increasing the amount and diversity of new ideas*, specifically as these ideas pertained to updating elements of the formal organizational system This increased the likelihood that tensions would be raised, thus incremental structural changes would be introduced, thereby creating opportunities for organizational alignment.

Brewing a culture of independent thinking. The formal aspects of codifying freedom also informally fostered a culture that would empower employee initiatives. First, as IT-GOV began to practice holacracy, employees realized in effect they were their own bosses and no longer needed to seek approval. They began shifting their perspective about what it meant work independently from formal managers, initially overreacting by turning the tables and telling their former bosses what to do, among other behaviors:

> "People took that 'no bosses anymore' to the extreme. There was a lot of tension on, you know, it's kind of like, 'You're nothing to me.' [Laughing] Once we got trained and we actually created our roles, then everybody kind of understood the rules of engagement. But until we had the roles, it was bizarre." (Team^{2}Member^1).

As the teams began creating roles, their choice of names and the way they referred to these roles sometimes reflected feeling greater authority. For example:

> "One of the new [roles] that is going to be created is what we're going to call the Ticket Titan. It's a name that I came up with, and it has to do with the responsibilities that I have, triaging our ticket queue and talking to customers, and actually giving the work to the other engineers. That's not something that was written into my job description, but because of holacracy, it's now something [that] is going to empower me to do those things. Which is pretty cool. Because now I get to be the boss of the ticket system." (Team^{5}Member^1)

Second, employees were able to look for opportunities to gain interesting or meaningful experiences independently from existing roles. We observed several instances where employees expanded their responsibilities by designing experiences they were interested in, which their team accepted after validating that these activities supported their team's purpose (see Table 3.5.3). Team^{1}Member^2, formerly a solutions architect, a purely technical job under the previous hierarchy, was interested in increasing her leadership capability. Over four years in holacracy, she began taking up opportunities to work on initiatives previously carried out by the former director while still maintaining her technical work. As Culture Coach, she had the opportunity to "create an awesome department culture," and to improve "team core values" and the "process for how the department hires employees." As Space Ace, she had the experience to create "an inspiring and productive space" and through other roles sought out ways to gain experience in branding and evangelizing ideas generated by the department.

Third, employees began to accept that they were personally responsible for their decisions. In the initial transition, it was common to witness other employees feeling anxious about being their own "boss." Not having to ask for permission from a manager could give one a sense of freedom and empowerment, but it could also increase the weight of accountability (see Table 3.5.3). Brewing a culture of independent thinking, in addition to building autonomy by making people feel that they were their own boss, empowered to seek interesting work, and personally responsible for their decisions' outcomes, also supported alignment by *making individuals feel safe to impact the organizational system* with their decisions and actions that oftentimes would entail changes at the organizational level. That sense of safety grew as employees learned to pair freedom (i.e., not having to seek for approval) with responsibility, thereby helping to overcome inertia by taking risks to improve the organization through their decisions, contributing to systematizing change.

3.5.2 Systematizing change

In analyzing how holacracy reconciles autonomy and alignment, another theme that emerged was alignment occurring through a transparent, fluid, and flexible structure that served to contain the perceptions and change initiatives of autonomous, empowered employees. Systematizing change is a primarily formal mechanism that provides the stable means of aligning dynamic, autonomous decisions and activities.

Sensing tensions. The first step of systematizing change was holding everyone responsible for monitoring tensions; i.e., to actively pay attention to changes required in the organization so that those tensions could be brought to everyone's attention. Based on archival data and interviews of our informants, a core supposition of holacracy is that every individual has a unique, valuable perspective. Thus, in the system, every person in an organization becomes formally a sensor for the organization, through the lenses of the formal roles that they hold (see Table 3.5.4). At IT-GOV, when someone from the perspective of their role saw a gap between what is and what should be, that person was bound by their agreement to uphold the constitution to raise it as a "tension." In this way, the organization was able to process various needs for improvement, setting the stage for each person to play their role and for each meeting to address the required changes. Sensing tensions helped to initiate ongoing adjustments that the informants believed were important. This idea was promoted across the organization:

> "I believe in the principles of self-management. You're a room full of adults, not kids that need to be managed by me. You're intelligent, and have a wealth of experience and education. Based on that premise, based on the idea that you know

what the right thing is to do, you are all sensors and can shape what is being done. We have a disciplined, structured approach to how you, as a group of adults, come together and develop common purpose and achieve common outcomes." ($Team^1Member^3$ to employees at an all-hands meeting, fieldnotes)

Applying the idea was more difficult. Employees experienced shifts in how they perceived, communicated, and resolved tensions. This is best illustrated by a conversation offsite during a "happy hour" had by the first IT-GOV experimental team, where one participant shared the following reflections:

"The first work with it [holacracy] was incredibly painful. I was like, 'What the hell?' We kept challenging each other. We really thought the objective was to shoot each other down, I mean, 'You're not getting anything by us.' Once we saw real facilitations, we really did need the model though, because we had no clue what we were doing. I went to the training down in California, in what had been provocative and confrontational and all this stuff suddenly turned into a kind strength to make sure that everybody had their space to participate. And calm. You are not invested in what this person's tension is. It's theirs, and your role is to help them resolve that, help the team integrate it. I'm like 'Wow, this is completely different than what we've been doing.' [laughs] I came back and I'm like, 'We're not doing this right, I can tell you that much.' [laughter]"

Employees told us that treating gaps between real and ideal situations as tensions was intended to be neutral, representing abstract considerations that were independent from any person in particular. The intent is to make it easier to engage in problem-solving as a group. A second feature of sensing tensions is thus depersonalizing problems so that system-wide solutions can be identified (see Table 3.5.4). In a Team 1 meeting, when an employee raised a tension about a lack of prioritization across projects, the formal meeting process led to an abstract system-wide analysis and the consideration of a new role to be created. Rather than any attempt to blame anyone for not addressing this issue previously, the team reviewed their current roles, decided that no roles explicitly covered this task, and recorded the gap in their software organizing tool, to be resolved at the next governance meeting.

Sensing tensions served as a driver for organizational alignment by providing a feedback loop between perceived emerging needs and subsequent flexible adaptations at the local level, and the overall organizational system. Sensing tensions also supported autonomy and codifying freedom by *putting focus on individuals' perceptions*, where everyone is a sensor and thus has a formal role, voice, and agency to think independently.

Modulating processes and practices. The second dimension of systematizing change was enabling individuals to make change continuous by constantly modulating processes and practices through formal means. The first step of ongoing transformation within a transparent, fluid, and flexible structure was IT-GOV's adoption of the holacracy constitution (see Table 3.5.5), which served as the blueprint by which to operate in a self-managing context, and was the basis by which everyone held their formal authority. Second, in the organization we saw new circles being created, existing circles being merged, or old circles becoming disbanded, not by former managers, but by former subordinates who were invested in making these changes:

> Researcher observations:
> During the period of research, after setting its initial structure in holacracy, the teams of IT-GOV made the following changes to the overall organizational circle structure:
> 1) Created the circles Business Systems, Business Automation, Service Catalog Curation, Data Innovation, Project Management, and Customer Service
> 2) Merged the circle Integration Services into the circle Data and Business Intelligence
> 3) Removed the circles Accounting Portfolio and Desktop Services

As an additional example within one circle, Team 1 made seven substantive changes to its circle over a four-month period (see Table 3.5.5), collectively resulting in structural changes to improve organizational alignment. These included creating two new sub-circles called Workforce Analytics and Business Automation, and adding accountabilities to them to refine their purpose. Additionally, they identified that the Culture Coach role had become burdened with too much responsibility, so they removed the employee onboarding accountability from it and created a new Onboarding Buddy role. Finally, they added the role of Training Coordinator, changed the role of Purchasing and Invoicing Gatekeeper, and added a new policy to streamline the Service Champion role, so that upon creation of a sub-circle representing the service, its scope was automatically transferred to the sub-circle and the role was retired.

Employees had the right to change the structure of their circle and organization through the creation or adaptation of roles, teams, and policies to optimize the impact and effectiveness of their work. This expresses how the organization's formal structure captured the autonomous activity of all the employees, driving its realignment in response to changing organizational needs. Additionally, modulating processes and practices *legitimized individual initiatives* to change elements of the formal organization, by supporting them with a structural foundation.

Generating transparency. Systematizing change required generating complete transparency about how employee initiatives were adjusting the organization, generally enabled by fully accessible online technology. IT-GOV employees used Glassfrog, a well-known software tool in holacracy, to track role creation, decisions, and workflow for self-organizing organizations. Glassfrog was formally used daily to organize meetings and workflow, and as the primary workspace for structuring roles, policies, and circles. See Table 3.5.6 for how software use was critically embedded into the maintenance and dynamics of the organizational structure during a governance meeting at IT-GOV.

Additionally, given that the roles and policies of all circles were dynamic, Glassfrog served as a central location that depicted the organizational structure and all associated roles and policies to anyone in the organization, at any point in time. Employees found the fit between their process and the tool as well as its convenience to be essential to their day-to-day work (see Table 3.5.6). This meant that they actively documented the changing structure in Glassfrog:

> Researcher observations:
> All fourteen teams at IT-GOV used Glassfrog software, which captured inputs of meetings and automatically converted them to outputs of role, policy, and structural changes. They used Glassfrog at meetings to 1) craft and review policy, 2) add, change, and remove roles, 3) add, change, and remove accountabilities, add and remove circles (teams), and 4) track checklists, metrics, projects, and tasks. Glassfrog retained history of all changes through automated meeting minutes. Because Glassfrog also retained all information about the roles and circles, on its home page, it generated an always up-to-date view of the organizational chart, with all roles and teams visualized in clusters of nested circles.

Finally, generating transparency required actively referencing the changes in the structure as appropriate for decision-making, which ensured that the evolving structure was present in people's minds. We observed teams accessing Glassfrog for assistance when trying to make a decision during a meeting (see Table 3.5.6). For instance, employees would ask the secretary to display a specific role on the projection screen to determine whether a work request of that role was appropriate. Sometimes the team would review the purpose of several roles to identify whether there was a gap, necessitating the creation of a new role. Additionally, teams would review roles to make sure there was no conflict or overlap between role purposes.

Generating transparency suggests the importance of formalized visibility to an adaptable structure to prevent chaos. Without transparency there could be no organizational alignment. Generating transparency, while fostering alignment, also reinforced autonomy by the *increased agency of employees through visibility.* This provided detailed information about the organization, enabling participants to make more informed decisions (e.g., creating new roles based on a clear understanding of the gaps in the organizational system).

3.5.3 Normalizing Disagreement

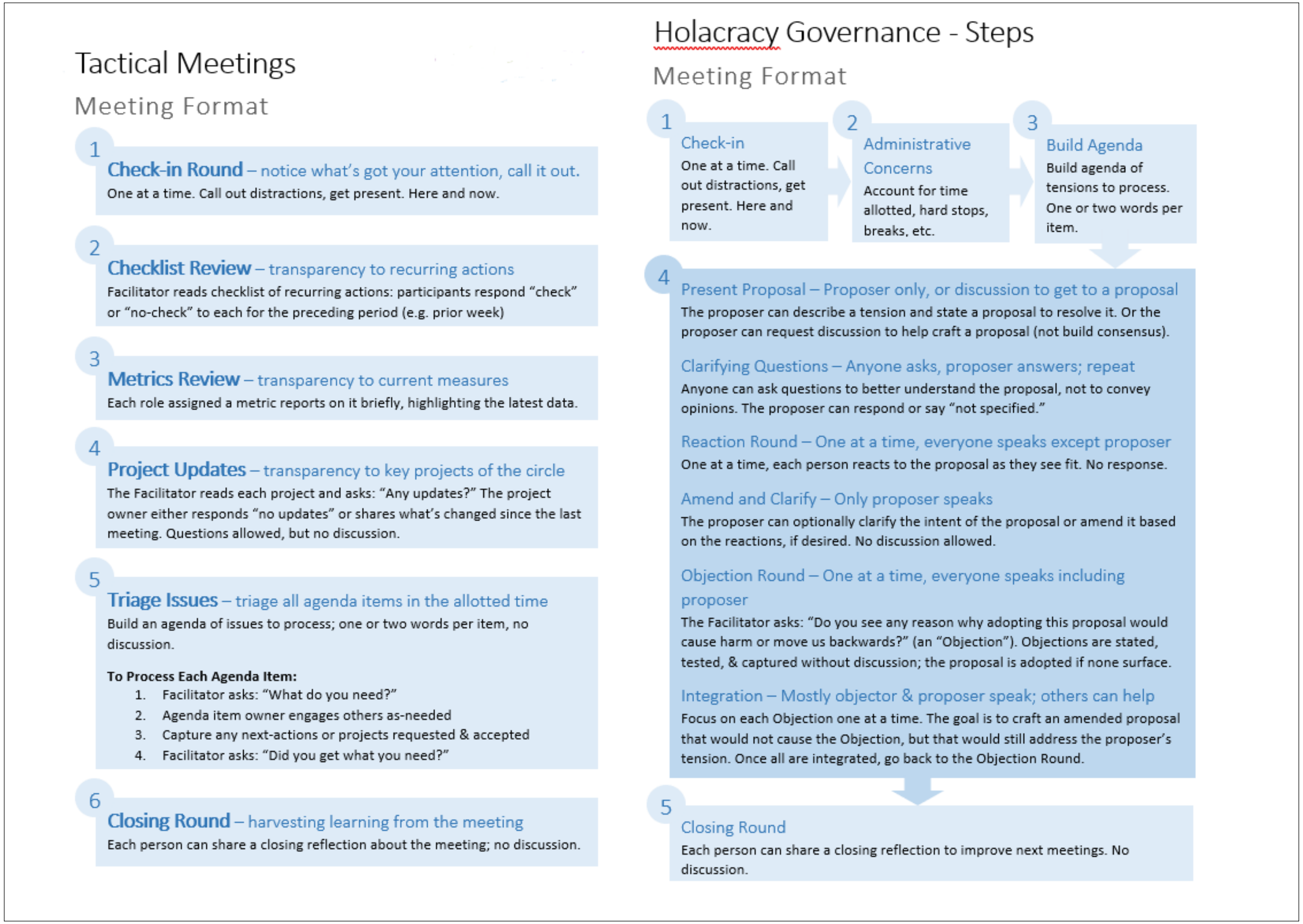
At the core of the mechanisms reconciling autonomy and alignment in holacracy was normalizing disagreement. Disagreement and tension rather than stability and consensus is the normal condition of holacracy, which allows for greater structural flexibility in organizations that are often in need to constantly adapt to changing environmental conditions. Normalizing disagreement is primarily an informal mechanism that supports and powers the formal mechanisms of codifying freedom and systematizing change, which in turn drive autonomy and alignment respectively.

Abandoning consensus. First, actions taken at IT-GOV were predicated on the principle in holacracy that people in the appropriate roles are empowered to make their own decisions. By organizational design, role-holders, upon identifying a tension they wanted to resolve, did not need to receive approval before taking action. Action would sometimes result in disagreements, but it was understood that disagreements should not typically hold employees back from doing what they felt was consistent with their roles' purpose. There was "the space to have professional disagreements" even with a co-worker who was formerly his supervisor (see Table 3.5.7).

Second, employees experienced holacracy to be designed with a bias toward action. In our repeated team observations, we found that the default response for any proposal to create or change roles, or to create or change policies, was approval. This did not mean that everyone believed that the proposal was a good idea. In fact, through the meeting process, it was common for people expressing their dislike of the proposal in the reaction round. But then, when the meeting moved to the objection round, these same people would decline to object, and the proposal would pass. Informally, as a social norm, team members often asked each other, "is it safe enough to try?" (see Table 3.5.7) and typically the response was affirmative, motivating the team to overcome its inertia in accepting a new approach.

Third, employees understood the distinction between consent and consensus (see Table 3.5.7). In declining to object to a proposal, team members gave their consent to structural changes, oftentimes without fully agreeing with the proposal, and certainly without reaching a consensus. In this vein of abandoning consensus, only qualified and "valid" objections would activate the process of integrating the objector's counter proposal into the original proposal. Facilitators of circles often asked, "Do you see any reason why adopting this proposal would cause harm or move us backwards?" (See Figure 3.6). Their interest was in making sure that this harm was actual and immediate, setting a high bar for objections.

Figure 3.6 Facilitator Help Sheet Used at IT-GOV to Conduct Tactical and Governance Meetings



Abandoning consensus contributed to reinforce and thus stabilize autonomy by *introducing a bias for autonomous change*, driven by the initiative of frontline employees, and capturing such autonomous initiatives through flexible structures that would align those changes with the overall purpose of the organization. Abandoning consensus also *generated conflicting opinions* into the alignment processes of systematizing change, fostering opportunities to consider diverse approaches.

Encouraging inquiry. We repeatedly observed individuals across the organization testing and questioning processes, structures, and assumptions that had been previously taken for granted. Occasionally, individuals and teams would go to great lengths to hash out tensions, not based on any formal rules or directives, but through informal and spontaneous social interaction when discussing role, team, and organizational purposes. For example, in one meeting, one team went through two objection and integration rounds to get the wording right for one new accountability to be added to one role. What stood out was the earnestness of team members working out their tensions (see Table 3.5.8). As one team member expressed:

> "I think when people understood that [we had] a safe environment where we can just bring up these things, have these discussions, and talk with everybody about it, then they felt more comfortable doing that. I think sometimes folks may have been concerned that if they brought something up, that it would get shot down or deferred. But being in a setting where everybody can discuss it and you can see that hey, the other people on one side of the table that really support this. But then you've got people on the other side of the table who don't support this. Now we can have this discussion and get this hashed out." (Team^{5}Member^1)

Additionally, our lead researcher witnessed bold, substantial organizational changes pushed through by individual employees, demonstrating a deeper engagement to test the organizational system and each other, questioning processes, structure, and assumptions previously taken for granted. For example, a former subordinate pushed through a proposal against the explicit objection of his former manager (see Table 3.5.8).

Through the meeting process, the proposal for the creation of a new role passed despite the objection. At the end of the meeting, Team[2]Member[4] said, "finally I feel empowered to do something about something I needed to fulfill my job properly." The structure seemed to give space for any employee, and not just former managers, to initiate substantial changes with measurable impact on the activities of the organization, even if these might be controversial.

Some of the changes were larger, involving, for example, the creation, merger, or removal of circles. Team[3]Member[4], for example, was part of a small circle called Integration Services whose lead link announced she was moving to a different part of the agency. Team[3]Member[4] was concerned that her circle was now too small, and spoke with her teammates about making a change and joining a larger, more established circle called Data/Business Intelligence. Then, she attended a governance meeting of the larger circle, representing her team. The ensuing discussion led to a proposal to formally execute an organizational change, merging the Integration Services circle with the larger circle, effective immediately.

These substantive changes demonstrate how encouraging enquiry, even in the face of controversial proposals, resulted in spaces for increasing autonomy and employee empowerment, which simultaneously supported alignment when the organization needed to adapt. Encouraging inquiry *reinforces a culture of thoughtful initiative*, strengthening autonomy and the mechanism of codifying freedom. Simultaneously, encouraging inquiry upholds alignment and the mechanism of systematizing change by ensuring that individuals' ideas are expressed, not repressed, thus *broadening the context of dialogue for the change process* and increasing the chances that alignment is reached.

The mechanism of normalizing disagreement simultaneously supports autonomy and alignment, and is supported in turn by the two mechanisms of codifying freedom and systematizing change. Autonomous employees boost an organization's ability to normalize disagreements because, as captured by the codifying freedom mechanism, that part of the structure *grants authority to disagree based on roles, encourages the practice of speaking up*, and *fosters diversity of opinion.* Similarly, the aligned structure bolsters an organization's ability to normalize disagreement because, as captured by the systematizing change mechanism, it *fosters the practice of constructive dissent, creates a stable space for dynamic change*, and *provides explicit context for disagreements* through transparency.

The mechanism of normalizing disagreement pushes the organization into a constant state of tension and renewal. It destabilizes rigid alignment by perpetually exploring differences of opinion, yet it stabilizes autonomy by persistently promoting open dialogue that brings employees into heightened awareness of the complexity of the dynamic organizational state.

At this point in the findings, we have introduced all components of the model of pluralistic bureaucracy and their relationships, represented with italicized phrases, resulting in the diagram in Figure 3.5. Next, we further illustrate the model through a within-case comparison.

3.5.4 Circle Comparison

To explore the significance of the model's mechanisms, we compared two teams who differed in how they performed in integrating autonomy and alignment. As a reference, IT-GOV developed a rubric to measure what they referred to as circle maturity (see Table 3.7), which shows how the organization defined a low- and high-performing circle in terms of enacting holacracy. We found that this rubric was consistent with how we conceptualized pluralistic bureaucracy. The rubric encouraged occasional proposals of more radical work reengineering, while maintaining clarity of roles and purpose. The high-performing circles were able to reconcile autonomy and alignment, while the low-performing circles reverted to a pattern of authority and control. See Table 3.6 for our summary of observations of all fourteen circles at IT-GOV. Below, we have marked in brackets where the team either supported a concept from our emergent model, i.e. [roles] or negated it [~~roles~~] through their actions.

Table 3.7 Excerpt from IT-GOV's initial rubric for evaluating circle performance

Measurement Criteria	**Low Performing Circle**	**High Performing Circle**
Lead Link Performance	Lead Link still acts like managers and leadership still looks like a hierarchical pyramid.	The organization has processes that replace many Lead Link authorities with effective distributed peer-to-peer methods, encoded transparently in governance.
Facilitator Performance	Circle has elected facilitator. Limited ability to hold to process, does not frame. Doesn't yet understand objection and integration decision making process. Fails to recognize reactions during clarifying questions. Is too lax or too controlling.	Automatically adjusts framing to room experience. Can maintain process with no interruptions. Quickly identifies reactions in clarifying questions. Protects space well and comfortably. Limits 'process time outs' to process questions. Is comfortable with governance process. Objections questions are smooth, clear, and appropriate.
Tactical Meetings Performance	Circle is mostly "going through the motions" of tactical meetings; other operational meetings look like they did before Holacracy, and ignore the circle's role structure.	Tactical meetings are used purely as a fallback; most operational needs are met outside of meetings or in ad-hoc meetings called when needed; teams self-reinforce role clarity in all meetings, not just in tacticals.
Governance Meetings Performance	Circle is mostly "going through the motions;" few agenda items; mostly just bringing clarity to existing functions; very dependent upon Facilitator to hold process.	Some proposals attempt significant re-engineering, even to the circle structure itself, and challenge deep assumptions about how work should be structured.
Decision making and action taking	Role-fillers mostly ignore governance and defer to the perceived leader or former manager on key decisions or significant actions to take.	Role-fillers own their authority but also seek input appropriately and organically; creating tension is not seen as something to avoid. Individual Action is accepted.
Focus on purpose	Purpose is assumed to be self-preservation and/or profit; explicit purpose statements non-existent or not treated seriously.	Organization's purpose is clearly differentiated from the purpose of its key people; purpose is a major focus in the culture; alignment with purpose is clearly happening at all levels of scale, continually.

A team reconciling autonomy and alignment. As an example of a high-performing team in the context of pluralistic bureaucracy, "Team A" defined their purpose inspirationally to "wow customers by delivering innovative solutions that rapidly evolve with their changing needs." They had developed clearly-defined strategies and specified their core values. In our daily observations, we noted that all team members seemed aware of the team's purpose, strategies, and values, with their discussions in and out of meetings focused on their goals. Team A was comprised of employees who regularly initiated activities through their roles. To fulfill the purpose of the circle, this team of seven had created almost 40 roles [pushing decisions into <u>roles</u>], all documented in Glassfrog [generating <u>transparency</u>] with their purposes and accountabilities. Several of these roles contained duties that had previously been part of the job of the team director. But a number of these roles were now held by former subordinates [emphasizing individual <u>voice</u>], such as Culture Coach, and Brand Steward [roles]. By observing seven meetings over two years, we noted the facility of team members in requesting and responding to work requests based on their roles [roles], in running efficient meetings [roles], and in creating governance tools for themselves, involving for example new roles and policies [<u>modulating processes</u> and practices]. Tensions were readily raised and resolved [sensing tensions]. Team members developed social skills and were able to inquire others' perspectives [encouraging inquiry] and hold differences of opinion but not insisting on their point of view when not important to do so [abandoning consensus].

Over the course of two years, Team A changed aspects of roles and policies regularly and also re-engineered its circle structure to accommodate changes in IT-GOV's needs [modulating processes]. A one-hour tactical meeting that we observed included 19 issues raised by 6 employees, each one taking 1-4 minutes on a variety of subjects, from hiring process, resourcing, strategy planning, and renaming their department, to doing a better job keeping their area clean [voice]. Our lead researcher found it notable that the former director on a given day knew a former subordinate was on leave, did not know when she was returning, and was not concerned that he did not know. When asked, he said that he trusted that the employee on vacation had managed all of her commitments, communicated to those whom she needed to, and thus had everything in hand without his need for control [brewing a culture of independent thinking].

Team A had profitable projects, good relationships with their customers, and retained highly skilled employees. The former team director regularly assessed his behavior to root out latent hierarchical tendencies [independent thinking]. The rest of the team members were authoritative in their roles and in the holacracy process, seemingly comfortable in sharing opinions and having different views from each other [independent thinking; abandoning consensus]. All seemed to take seriously their responsibility to raise tensions [sensing tensions] and to work through governance process [voice; modulating process], to hold elections [voice] and continually modify roles, policies, and even circle structure as changes to workflow necessitated adjustments to the structure [modulating process].

Team A developed its process and shared understanding to embody the characteristics that are critical for codifying freedom [roles, voice, and independent thinking], systematizing change [sensing tensions, modulating processes, and transparency], and normalizing disagreement [abandoning consensus and encouraging inquiry], which provide formal and informal resources for the reconciliation and reinforcement of autonomy and alignment.

A team reverting back to hierarchical authority and control. As an example of a low-performing team in the context of pluralistic bureaucracy, “Team B” set a purpose that restated their team's name, without further elaboration of strategy or values. Similar to Team A, Team B was also a team of seven, but during most of the observation period had only created five roles that largely duplicated their existing job titles [~~roles~~]. Through the observation of seven meetings over two years, the former manager continued to exercise dominance [~~independent thinking~~] and all but one of the former subordinates typically behaved in a deferring, hierarchical manner towards the manager [~~voice~~]. The former manager directed the other employees, stating what was and was not their responsibility, assigning work and stating expectations, and often interrupting them [~~independent thinking~~]. From one of our observations: "The group has a tendency to devolve into structureless conversation [~~encouraging inquiry~~]. They get into making wish lists that they do not act on, and making complaints without focused problem solving."

Team B struggled to follow the structured meeting process defined by holacracy, relying on the one team member who was most interested in it to both facilitate and record the meetings [~~voice~~]. Most of the team seemed uninterested in learning or participating in any governance process [~~modulating processes~~]. Towards the end of our observation period, the former manager came to a governance meeting with five proposals for new roles simply to delegate work during his upcoming month-long vacation [~~roles~~]. During the former manager's absence at meetings, the rest of the team often spoke about him, discussing his instructions, his decision to stop a particular initiative, their assumptions about whether he approved an idea, and whether the team needed to wait until he was present to make an important decision [~~independent thinking~~].

The former team manager of Team B did not seem to make any adjustments to the norms of self-management, preferring to remain a commanding presence. Congruently, the former subordinates, maintained deference towards the manager and their work focus remained on what he wanted [~~sensing tensions~~]. There was little self-governance through the creation of new roles and policies initiated by the circle [~~modulating processes~~] and compared to Team A, less effort at documenting changes in Glassfrog [~~transparency~~]. Instead, the former manager continued to make key decisions for the team. Team B did not evolve into the practices and mechanisms that assist the integration of autonomy and alignment, including codifying freedom and systematizing change, and especially normalizing disagreement. Instead it reverted back to the practice of hierarchical authority and control.

This within-case comparison exercised the various components of our emergent model to demonstrate that in the presence of the mechanisms of pluralistic bureaucracy, reconciliation between autonomy and alignment may be possible, while in the absence of these mechanisms, the norms of unitary authority and control are likely to prevail.

3.6 DISCUSSION

3.6.1 Implications for Research

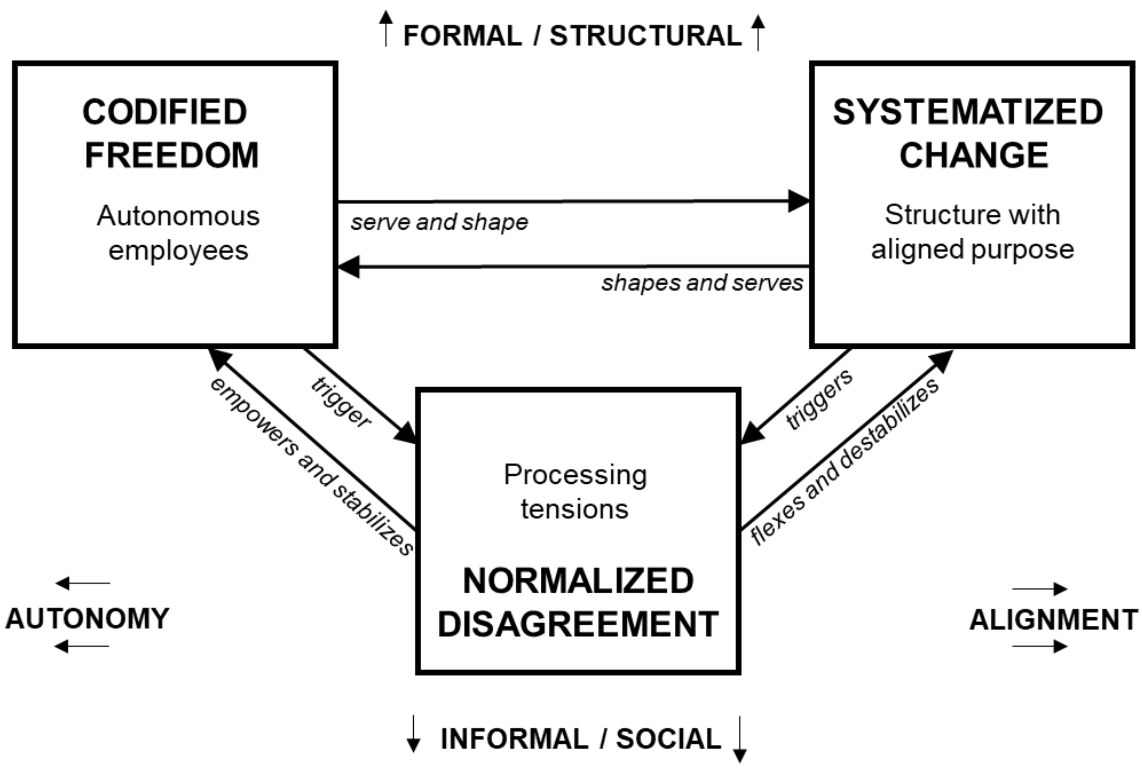
Our model (see Figure 3.5) aims to solve the theoretical puzzle of how large bureaucratic organizations reconcile autonomy and alignment without relying on traditional bureaucratic control by explaining the functioning of a pluralistic bureaucracy. Compared to the traditional unitary bureaucracy, a pluralistic bureaucracy replaces the authority of managers by a system of distributed authority relying on the autonomy of employees. Thus, our findings portray *autonomy* as distributed and flexible *authority*, without the trappings of a rigid hierarchical authority. Consequently, we observed *alignment* as distributed and flexible *control*, freed from rigid hierarchical power. If a traditional bureaucracy with a unitary perspective is a “structure of hierarchically arranged authority” (Gouldner, 1954: 19), according to our findings a pluralistic bureaucracy is a structure of hierarchically arranged *autonomy*, a formal structure designed to facilitate high levels of autonomy, serving as a container of self-directed yet aligned initiatives. Autonomy needs not be subject to the conditional approval of managers, case by case (Gouldner, 1954), but is baked into the bureaucratic structure itself.

Beyond these implications, the model makes three specific contributions to the literature on bureaucracy in organizations that relate to scholarly discourses about (1) the relationship between autonomy and alignment, (2) the interplay between formal and informal elements, and (3) the puzzle about bureaucracy's flexibility.

The *first contribution* of our model is explaining how autonomy and alignment in a pluralistic bureaucracy can be reconciled. Previous literature has portrayed the relationship between worker autonomy and managerial alignment as a paradox (Barker, 1993; Mazmanian et al., 2013; Poole & Van de Ven, 1989), in part because its assumption of bureaucratic control as the primary way of ensuring alignment with organizational goals in a unitary bureaucracy. Our findings on pluralistic bureaucracy challenge this view and suggest that a potentially more useful lens is 'duality,' where seeming contradictions between autonomy and alignment coexist in a mutually enabling and interdependent state (Farjoun, 2010; Smith & Besharov, 2019) rather than in a paradox of autonomy versus control. We find that this complementary duality of autonomy and alignment in a pluralistic bureaucracy is achieved through the combination of *codifying freedom* and *systematizing change*, which mutually reinforce each other.

More specifically, the duality between autonomy and alignment is reconciled as the codified freedom of employees is shaped by the organization's aligned structure, which in turn is shaped and transformed by the employees through their day-to-day activities, through roles, structures for voice, and a culture of independent thinking. Simultaneously, through sensing tensions, modulating processes and practices, and generating transparency, the systematized change inherent in the organizational structure serves the work of autonomous employees, who in turn serve the organization through activities within a systematically aligned purpose. This double feedback loop across the mechanisms reinforces both autonomy and alignment, and operates in a constant search for "dynamic equilibrium" (Fox, 1966: 2), under constant negotiation, ever emergent and evolving. See the distillation of our model in the duality between autonomy and alignment in Figure 3.7. This duality, enabled by pluralism (Astley & Van de Ven, 1983), is inherently flexible and engages with uncertainty and contradiction (Ashcraft, 2001; Child & McGrath, 2001). It may "enable organizations to retain some of the benefits of bureaucracy and anarchy without committing to all their liabilities," and thus "foster renewal while limiting the pains of comprehensive change" (Farjoun, 2010: 219).

Figure 3.7 Illustration of Duality Between Autonomy and Alignment Expressed Across Mechanisms of Pluralistic Bureaucracy



These findings have important implications for research on bureaucracy's critical features (Adler, 2012) and their impacts on individuals (Gabriel, 2005; Hirst, 2011).

While previous research on unitary bureaucracy emphasizes formal structure, hierarchy and bureaucratic control (Walton, 2016), our findings about the complementary interplay between codifying freedom and systematizing change in pluralistic organizations (Denis et al., 2001; Eisenhardt, 2000) shift the conversation of bureaucracy towards autonomous pluralistic participation (both in the execution of work and in the design of the organization's structure) and dynamic democratic alignment (instead of bureaucratic control). A key implication of this shift is allowing for a more distributed, egalitarian, and less hierarchical form of bureaucracy that may foster greater individual creativity and participation in management (Fox, 1966). Rather than systematically limiting the use of intelligence by employees (Heckscher, 1994), we find that through the reconciliation of autonomy and alignment, bureaucratic structures and processes may accomplish the opposite: to maximize the autonomy and use of intelligence by employees (Mansfield, 1973; Scott, 2003: 267).

The *second contribution* of our model to the discourse on bureaucracy in organizations (e.g., Adler, 2012) focuses on the enhanced interplay between formal and informal systems within pluralistic bureaucracies. In prior literature on bureaucracy, assuming a unitary frame of reference, formal and informal systems are portrayed as inconsistent (Gulati & Puranam, 2009), with informal processes being hidden and excluded from bureaucratic structures shaped by formal systems (Heckscher, 1994). However, we find that as autonomy is central to pluralistic bureaucracies, the formal and informal elements of the organization intermesh with each other, and rather than conflicting, informal processes enhance the effectiveness of formal systems and the overall organization by making it more flexible.

As boundaries between managers and employees become blurry, the context is created for leveraging informal elements, including social and emotional processes, for ongoing organizational renewal and improvement. In our case, in high performing circles, we found a social fluency and verbal transparency in action, where each employee had ongoing, built-in occasions to express themselves and receive information and emotional indications about how each person was feeling, what they thought, and what they wanted. This informal social flow, which was reinforced by standardized rules and practices in the organization, impacted daily decisions about strategy, structure, and work. Thus, formal and informal elements influenced each other (McEvily, Soda, & Tortoriello, 2014), continually regenerating the organization (Clement & Puranam, 2018). This mutual dynamic supports a perpetually evolving organizational design, flexible yet structured (Garud, Jain, & Tuertscher, 2008; Scott, 2003: 81).

In pluralistic bureaucracy, formal systems support informal processes by helping employees raise tensions and express their voice within their roles; they also encourage the resolution of tensions and the ongoing adaptation of the organization's formal structure. Formal rules may be experienced as humane in some cases. Managers in a unitary bureaucracy, at their discretion, may opt for leniency in the face of cold, inflexible rules, so that employees feel treated "humanly," exercising a "proper attitude," so to speak (Gouldner, 1954: 54). In comparison, employees in a pluralistic bureaucracy, may feel they are treated humanly by virtue of a *proper structure*, one that may allow for more self-determination (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and more emotional and meaningful engagement with work. This feature may be attractive to emotionally intelligent and technologically empowered employees in the modern workplace (Notter, 2018), in contrast to the reputation of unitary bureaucracies (Gabriel, 2005). In line with Gabriel's (2005: 23) observation about postmodern workplaces, we find that in a pluralistic bureaucracy the iron cage of rationality yields to "flexible workplaces, which demand adaptable… and emotionally literate employees."

In contrast to critics of unitary bureaucracy who lament its split between formal and informal systems (Heckscher, 1994), we find that through pluralistic bureaucracy, formal and informal systems are actually reconciled and strengthened, which has important implications both for the attractiveness and the scalability of pluralistic organizations. The interplay between formal and informal components systems may enable scaling pluralistic bureaucracy into larger organizations, with formal spaces for voice, autonomy and a collaborative culture. Standard formal structures, like building blocks, can be reproduced and deployed in multiple parts of the organization and can bring consistency, predictability, and uniformity to the organization, while informal processes infuse those formal structures with energy and life.

The *third contribution* of our model to the literature on bureaucratic organization relates to the theoretical puzzle about bureaucracy's flexibility and thus its viability, in ever more complex settings. Our findings suggest that the emphasis on roles, as the central arena for autonomous decision-making, has the potential to lead to high organizational adaptability and flexibility, as organizations do not rely on the person but on the role (Thompson & Alvesson, 2005), which is more easily changeable (Kallinikos, 2004; Luhmann, 1995). Additionally, as a consequence of giving all employees responsibility for processing tensions and for modulating the structure of organizations through formal structure and rules, standardization makes organizations flexible because they can more easily scale organizational transformation (Kallinikos, 2004).

To fully understand the flexibility and viability of pluralistic bureaucracy, however, it is important to consider the role of *normalizing disagreement*, the third key mechanism in our model that serves as the binding glue holding the pluralistic bureaucracy together. Earlier, we explained how autonomous employees (with codified freedom) and a flexible structure with aligned purpose (enabled by systematized change) shape and serve each other in a complementary duality (see Figure 3.7). This duality between autonomy and alignment animating the organization requires ongoing processing of tensions and constantly triggers the mechanism of normalizing disagreement. Normalized disagreement interacts with both sides of the duality, autonomy and alignment, by empowering autonomous employees on one hand and by further flexing the structure to achieve alignment on the other. Normalized disagreement stabilizes employee autonomy (with codified freedom), by reinforcing agency, and destabilizes the structural alignment of the organization (enabled by systematizing change), thus reinforcing its continual adaptation.

In a unitary bureaucracy, tensions and disagreements about what the organization should do, or how it should adapt, often remain unresolved below the surface or in a state of partial resolution (Cyert & March, 1963), which can result in organizational inertia. To the extent that resolving disagreements requires a change in the formal structure or processes and not simply a one-time exception granted at the discretion of managers, traditional (unitary) bureaucratic adaptation is often too slow and episodic to fit the requirements of continuously changing environments. By the time transformation is attempted, the scale of tension between what is and should be may be too large.

By contrast, pluralistic bureaucracies democratically empower employees to sense and process tensions, and modulate the formal organization on an ongoing basis. Our findings suggest that disagreements continuously surface and thus change is made in smaller and more manageable increments, preventing conflict from paralyzing the organization. While continuous processing and resolution of tensions through normalizing disagreement may create inefficiencies and a waste of resources in the short-term (Armbrüster, 2005), the development of those capabilities of processing disagreement may actually generate flexibility and adaptability in the long-term

(Ashcraft, 2001; Follett, 1918/1998; Follett, 1995). Bureaucratic rules, which often temporarily reduce tensions among employees in the interest of protecting manager interests (Gouldner, 1954: 241), instead are employed to elevate tensions (Schad, Lewis, Raisch, & Smith, 2016), mobilizing the organization accordingly. Rather than systematically limiting the ability of organizations to change (Heckscher, 1994), pluralistic bureaucracies are under constant adaptation, which prepares those organizations to thrive in environments characterized by constant and rapid changes.

3.6.2 Implications for Practice

A model of pluralistic bureaucracy can serve to significantly boost how companies trying to increase autonomy while maintaining alignment can understand their challenges and tune their organizations. Few attempts have been made to model these processes, despite the fact that this balancing act is required increasingly in practice in ever larger firms.

Requirements. Compared with a unitary bureaucracy, a pluralistic bureaucracy may require more complex rules and formal structures since they involve the interaction and coordination of multiple actors in the design of the organization and in setting its strategic direction. Pluralistic organizations may require more deliberation and perhaps more time in making decisions and adaptations to the organization, and may have a steep learning curve to incorporate ways of working that may in some cases be perceived as unusual and time-consuming. They may need to invest in communication, computer technology, and social reinforcements to make information and processes immediately transparent to all organizational members, to nurture shared purpose and to keep everyone informed about the latest changes so they are able to make opportune adaptations to their work.

Advantages. The advantages of pluralistic bureaucracies as described here may be their dynamism and adaptability, and their engaging and participative culture, which incorporates or at least is open to the ideas and participation of everyone. It has therefore some of the key ingredients of an innovative culture. Other strengths may be their transparency and their attractiveness to employees who value their autonomy and expertise and are at the same time open to collaborating with others and subordinate their interests to common goals. For all of those reasons, pluralistic bureaucracies may be more stable in today's volatile environments.

Disadvantages. The disadvantages include the amount of time and attention invested by all in organizational or administrative decisions, together with their documentation, that may not be the "work to be done" for clients. Some who love the work they do may resent those distractions in organizational matters and may yearn for managers who would take away those responsibilities from them. In situations where long-term planning is possible and customers know what they want, this investment in adaptability may be excessive. Pluralistic bureaucracies may also require rare talent that may not abound in organizations. After all, in the context of doing a job, many people may prefer to simply be told what to do.

3.7 FUTURE RESEARCH AND CONCLUSION

This study proposes mechanisms of pluralistic bureaucracy for mutually reinforcing autonomy and alignment based on inductive analysis of ethnographic data at a single organization that partially implemented holacracy. We do not intend to claim to have presented an exhaustive analysis of either pluralistic bureaucracy or holacracy. Despite these limitations, an extreme case such as the one presented in this paper can offer opportunities for insight and study in little known processes and ways of managing. If a theory of pluralistic bureaucracy gains interest and survives empirical testing over time, it would be useful to identify how previously disparate concepts may be viewed as more similar in this context and advance further understanding across multiple research streams. For instance, while the tomato processing plant Morning Star has become a well-known case in self-management (Hamel, 2011), because of its CLOUs, or formal organizational contracts, it may be advantageous for theory advancement to analyze the company instead as an instance of pluralistic bureaucracy. This designation may apply as well to some network organizations (Benkler, 2006), lean organizations such as Toyota (Scott, 2003: 256; Womack, Jones, & Roos, 1990), platform-based organizations (Helfat & Raubitschek, 2018), governance of open source communities such as Wikipedia and Debian (O'Mahony & Ferraro, 2007), and technologically driven organizational forms such as decentralized autonomous organizations or DAOs (Norta, Othman, & Taveter, 2015).

Future research might consider study of an organization with full implementation of a system of pluralistic bureaucracy that investigates how tensions are processed across teams throughout the organization, for broader understanding of how pluralistic bureaucracy works and how it may break down in some cases. Further research could investigate how mechanisms of pluralistic bureaucracy fare in these and other contexts. For instance, the mechanism of normalizing disagreement, which was critical in our study, may not be important for DAOs. Additionally, there may be aspects of our study that merit further investigation for additional insight, for example, we identified that technology plays a significant role in generating transparency, but did not examine it in detail. Other avenues for further research could be a cross-case comparison between pluralistic and unitary bureaucracies, or multiple cases of pluralistic bureaucracy across different organizations. Research in other industries and environments may yield further specification or even new mechanisms based on contingency.

Bureaucracy is oftentimes criticized for its inflexibility, yet what has been mostly overlooked in this debate is that much of this criticism is rooted in the model of bureaucratic control based on a unitary frame of reference. In this study, we problematized this underlying assumption, peered beyond bureaucratic control, and analyzed the phenomenon of holacracy as an example for a pluralistic bureaucracy. Our model explains the mechanisms by which autonomy and alignment can be reconciled in large organizations without relying on traditional bureaucratic control. By fostering high employee autonomy through the use of core bureaucratic features (e.g., formal rules, roles, standards) rather than relying on informal processes only, while simultaneously ensuring organizational alignment, bureaucratic flexibility becomes possible. Emphasis is shifted away from typical managerial hierarchy and bureaucratic control and refocused on inherently flexible core features of bureaucracy, including formal roles and rules defined and adapted by everyone participating in day-to-day management. Thus, autonomy may flourish and does not get undercut by a more pluralistic approach to alignment. Based on these findings, we suggest that a pluralistic frame of reference provides a fruitful foundation for reconciling the different views on bureaucracy's flexibility and viability, helping to resolve past debates in order to provide grounding and anchoring for important future research.

4

From Hierarchy to Self-Management: How Unmoored Managers Cope with Transformation of Organizational Form

This chapter aims to address the second overarching research question of this PhD thesis by empirically investigating emergent behaviors of unmoored managers during the process of conversion to self-management.

4.1 ABSTRACT

Self-management has become an attractive option in the range of available organizational structures for companies seeking innovative and entrepreneurial outcomes. Thus, some firms existing previously as hierarchies are converting to more non-hierarchical structures whose core tenet is self-management. A yet unanswered question in the literature on post-bureaucratic organization is: How do managers, as a significantly impacted category of organizational actors, cope with this organizational transformation to self-management? This in-depth field study concerns a large US-based IT organization undergoing such transformation. The study results reveal a range of emergent behaviors of managers "unmoored" by the organization's conversion to self-management. These emergent behaviors are detailed and delinieated in a temporal process model. These findings have implications for researchers investigating the self-management phenomenon and the changing identity of managers as well as practitioners seeking effective self-management implementation.

4.2 INTRODUCTION

Managers whose companies undergo a transformation from traditional hierarchy to self-management may lose their titles and the authority that comes with rank in a top-down organizational chart. Studies about self-management typically focus on impact to employees or the organization. Research does not often assess impact to the manager, particularly in the case of changing from a more hierarchical to a less hierarchical form of organizing.

Though the purpose of organizational transformation to self-management typically stems from the desire to better compete (Lee & Xia, 2010; Millikin, Hom, & Manz, 2010) or meet the increasing cultural demand for employee autonomy (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010), the loss of manager identity that ensues may have negative effects on the former managers as well as the organization by association (Conroy & O'Leary-Kelly, 2014). In the post-bureaucratic context, managers often experience increased uncertainty and instability (Langfred & Rockmann, 2016; Thomas & Linstead, 2002) and loss of power (Vallas, 1999), even without a change in organizational form. Adding the loss of job title and positional authority along with these stressors, as is the case when formally switching to a self-management system such as holacracy, could easily create a crisis in identity for the former managers.

How do managers, as a significantly impacted category of organizational actors, cope with this organizational transformation to self-management? To answer this question, an ethnographic study was undertaken where the lead researcher embedded from 2016 to 2018 in IT-ORG, an organization in the process of implementing holacracy, a self-management structure. Studying eight former managers and their associated teams, six emergent behaviors that unmoored managers demonstrated during the conversion process to self-management were identified: Vacillating, Doubting, Feigning/Maneuvering, Testing/Integrating, Exiting, and Embracing. A temporal process model includes three phases that the unmoored managers experienced as the organization moved toward self-management: Orientation, Adaptation, and Resolution. Further types of manager behavior are described: regression to control, awkwardness across the boundaries of hierarchy and self-management, and evolution of leadership through disrupting control. Finally, through analyzing a series of network diagrams detailing new roles held by the eight former managers and teams, differences are surfaced between control-based and evolution-based positioning in the team. By better understanding how the organizational conversion to self-management affects unmoored managers, more directed research is supported regarding improved implementation of self-managing systems. This study additionally contributes novel insights and empirical evidence regarding power, identity, and the complexity and ambiguity that middle managers experience in a post-bureaucratic context (Langfred & Rockmann, 2016), specifically a condition where they lose their managerial titles and authority.

4.3 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

4.3.1 Self-Management

Enabling employees is of paramount concern in the modern workplace (Adler & Heckscher, 2018), and is accompanied increasingly by organizational changes that demote the power of managers or even remove managers altogether (Hamel, 2011; Petriglieri, 2015). Self-management continues to be a relevant topic for practitioners as a mechanism for empowering employees and creating healthier organizational dynamics (Manz & Sims, 1995, Laloux, 2014). Some regard self-management as a necessary adaptation for younger generations of workers (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). Though firms such as Morning Star, Semco, Valve, and Zappos may be regarded as outliers in a constellation typified by hierarchical organizational norms, flat organizational structures are becoming more mainstream in management practice (Hamel, 2011; Hamel, 2014; Hamel & Zanini, 2018; Rigby, Sutherland, & Noble, 2018).

How an organization is structured is an important subject in the strategic management of innovation (Damanpour, 1991; Gulati, Puranam, & Tushman, 2009; Keupp, Palmié, & Gassmann, 2012; Volberda, Van Den Bosch, & Heij, 2013). Organizations adopt non-hierarchical organizational structures such as self-management because, in an increasingly uncertain and fast-changing environment, they are regarded as supportive of innovation and entrepreneurial outcomes (Aime, Humphrey, DeRue, & Paul, 2014; Davis & Eisenhardt, 2011; Gay, Salaman, & Rees, 1996; Van de Ven, 1986) and increased performance (Csaszar, 2012; Lee & Xia, 2010; Leonardi, 2007; Millikin et al., 2010). While newly created organizations are more simply able to choose their organizational structure upon their inception, extant organizations that wish to exploit the reputed advantages of self-management must embark on a more complex path of conversion from their extant forms to less hierarchical structures. Self-management, as a decentralized organizational structure, typically provides autonomy and empowerment to individuals and teams (Kirkman & Rosen, 1999).

Holacracy, created and trademarked in 2007 by Brian Robertson (Robertson, 2015), is an emerging self-management organizational structure, reportedly used by more than one thousand companies across the world within 10 years of its creation. Holacracy does not have managers; instead it operates through interlinked self-managing and self-governing teams. Holacracy became more well known when the CEO of Zappos, an Amazon-owned online retail company with over 2,000 employees, made a surprising announcement in 2015 that he was converting the company to this previously obscure organizational form, a move which was widely covered in mainstream business media (Gelles, 2015; Silverman, 2015).

Holacracy purports to do away with hierarchy, favoring a rules-based organizational system that works through networks of teams, called "circles" (Robertson, 2015). It takes the concept of self-management beyond a team-based approach into the organizational structure as a whole in order to balance needs for both reliability and adaptability (Bernstein, Bunch, Canner, & Lee, 2016). In adopting holacracy, and organization eliminates formal managers and gives employees complete autonomy to carry out their work through a set of explicit roles (Lee & Edmondson, 2017).

4.3.2 Middle Managers and Identity in Post-Bureaucracy

Post-bureaucracy literature explores the conditions and outcomes of decentralized power and instable structure fomented by modern environmental dynamism and market pressure. It is in this general context of post-bureaucracy both where self-management typically arises and the literature in which the plight of contemporary middle managers is researched (Clegg & Baumeler, 2010; Josserand, Teo, & Clegg, 2006; Stewart, Astrove, Reeves, Crawford, & Solimeo, 2017). For this reason, it is relevant to further investigate middle managers in post-bureaucracy, particularly on the issue of managerial identity.

Some authors question whether post-bureaucracy is substantially different from regular bureaucracy, in that managers are still doing managerial work (Clegg, 2011; Hales, 2002; Farrell & Morris, 2013). Other authors state that middle managers in post-bureaucracies experience a more complex and vague role in the organization (Langfred & Rockmann, 2016), and believe they have to constantly prove their worth, suffering from a loss of identity and increased job uncertainty (Thomas & Linstead, 2002; Farrell & Morris, 2013). Some managers may experience a "stickiness of identity" where they have difficulty letting go of their identification of being a manager in a hierarchy (Josserand et al., 2006: 61).

The lost identity of managers in the post-bureaucracy context can have multiple effects on former managers and their organizations. It can trigger attempts by the former managers to maintain or regain legitimacy (Thomas & Linstead, 2002), which may distract their focus away from organizational goals. This loss may impact the managers' experiences and their interpersonal relationships at work (Meister, Jehn, & Thatcher, 2014). The loss of identity may even lead managers to obstruct organizational initiatives toward employee empowerment (Stewart et al., 2017). On the other hand, when managers are able to reconcile their loss and either create a new identity or forge a stronger bond with the organizational identity, they may transition to a position where they may positively impact the organization (Dukerich, Golden, & Shortell, 2002; Reay, Goodrick, Waldorff & Casebeer, 2017).

In general, research suggests that middle managers fear delayering in the workplace, and feel threatened by changes that would result in decreasing their power and authority in the organization (Vallas, 1999). Vallas (2006) and others (Barker, 1993; Foss, 2003; Stewart et al., 2017) have provided valuable insight about how workers react to workplace initiatives designed to empower teams with more autonomy. However, no research that I am aware of has attempted to explore the process that managers go through when an organization shifts the balance of power from managers to workers.

4.3.3 What Happens to Managers in a Self-Management Conversion?

Self-management transformation affects aspects of the entire organization, but perhaps no category of individuals is more impacted than the managers of the organization. These former managers are “unmoored” from their anchorage in a top-down hierarchical organizational chart when the organizational structure becomes more flat, or less hierarchical (Daft & Lewin, 1993). In the absence of a hierarchy, they lose their positional authority, and in some cases, their titles as managers. These changes have been shown to trigger identity loss (e.g., Conroy & O'Leary-Kelly, 2014) or a backlash against the organization’s efforts to empower individuals and teams in a flatter structure (e.g., Stewart, Astrove, Reeves, Crawford, & Solimeo, 2017).

However, despite these useful studies, our understanding of how a change from a traditional hierarchical to a less hierarchical organizational structure affects unmoored managers is patchy at best. For example, we know from Conroy and O’Leary-Kelly (2014) that these changes trigger identity loss, but we do not know how this identity loss impacts on subsequent choices and actions by the unmoored managers. We also know from the study by Stewart and colleagues that these changes can trigger a backlash, but what kind of backlash? Is this backlash a unified response or are there varied responses? What are its antecedents?

Answering these questions require a more in-depth understanding of how unmoored managers process and react to the change from a hierarchical to a less hierarchical organizational structure, hence the study's research question: How do unmoored managers experience and react to the change from a hierarchical to a self-management organizational structure? This study focuses on unmoored managers because despite losing their positional status, their existing relationships with their teams and their potential skills in coordinating innovative, entrepreneurial, and strategic activities in a less hierarchical environment means that they potentially remain influential leaders within the organization (Büschgens, Bausch, & Balkin, 2013; García-Morales, Jiménez-Barrionuevo, & Gutiérrez-Gutiérrez, 2012).

4.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.4.1 Research Design

Ethnographic research was conducted at IT-ORG, a state governmental agency in the US that uses information technology to provide software and hardware services throughout the state (all names changed for the purpose of anonymity). IT-ORG has implemented holacracy, a self-managing system in use by hundreds of organizations (Lee & Edmondson, 2017). The research setting was ideal for the study, because IT-ORG was in the midst of changing its organizational structure during the time period in which research was conducted. Previous to this study, IT-ORG operated as a hierarchy with one top executive managing eight senior managers, who in turn managed 89 teams in four additional layers of management. At the time of the study, out of about 500 employees in total at IT-ORG, approximately 25% practiced self-management. One division, eventually comprised of 14 teams at IT-ORG, practiced self-management on an ongoing basis, while other teams in other divisions were using self-management on a year-long trial basis, with the option of per-team evaluation and opt-in or opt-out decision.

4.4.2 Research Methods

Ethnographic techniques were employed to gather rich, detailed data on informants' daily life and experiences for analysis (Watson, 2011). The lead researcher negotiated access to the research site, was provided a desk, laptop, and building access badge, and embedded in the team. This qualitative inductive study focuses on theory building and an "engaged scholarship" approach (Van de Ven, 2007). In the research site access, the lead researcher had the benefit of both being immersed in the team while retaining a detached, critical perspective of the organizational activities through participant observations (Van Maanen, 2011). Given that the research question centered on the question of "how" managers coped, the research focus also made ethnographic study an ideal research design.

4.4.3 Research Setting

At IT-ORG, former managers underwent an "unmooring" from their anchorage in positional status within a managerial hierarchy. They lost their titles as formal managers and experienced the reversal of the previous assumptions that they as managers would lead meetings, would make final decisions, would be deferred to by subordinates, and in general would hold presumptive authority based on their title and position alone. Within their specific form of self-management, managers at IT-ORG formally divested their power by signing a written statement that they would follow the same set of rules and procedures, called the holacracy constitution, that governed the activities of everyone else in the organization. Following these new rules meant the unmoored managers would no longer tell other workers what to do. Rather than making all management decisions based on their own authority, these unmoored managers would engage in a team process to decide their own policies and procedures, where all participants had equal input regardless of their experience or expertise.

4.4.4 Data and Analysis

IT-ORG was an ideal site to study the "unmooring" of managers because as the lead researcher began her study it was transitioning from managerial hierarchy to holacracy, and she was able to research with an ethnographic approach as a participant observer (Van Maanen, 2011; Watson, 2011). The lead researcher worked at IT-GOV for six months in the first year, and visited annually for the next two years, with one observation period of three weeks and another for six weeks.

From October to December 2016, the lead researcher visited the research site during regular business hours each day, observed meetings, spoke informally with participants, and accessed online data while participants were undergoing the transformation to self-management. From January to May 2017, she conducted interviews, made participant observations, and collected archival data as participants continued to adjust to self-management. The lead researcher continued similar research from June to July 2018, with additional on-site interviews in March and April 2019. The study contains a total of 52 semi-structured interviews, 69 meeting observations, 39 memos, extensive daily field notes, and a total of approximately 240 hours spent embedded in the organization. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Data was triangulated across multiple sources in order to increase reliability.

This study focuses upon eight former managers at IT-GOV in an embedded single case design (Yin, 2014), see Table 4.1 for details. These managers were chosen based on three criteria. The first criteria was that the lead researcher was able to interview both the former manager and associated team members (rather than solely the manager), in order to increase points of data access to increase reliability. Second, the pool of former managers was narrowed to those who in the lead researcher's assessment responded openly and honestly, demonstrating authenticity during the interviews. She wanted to understand how these former managers were coping, which meant that they needed to have honest conversations where the informants were willing to say things that did not always cast them or the situation in the best light. The final criteria was that the lead researcher was freely able to observe the meetings in which the former manager participated, and that, in her assessment, the behavior of the manager and the rest of the team had the quality of unguardedness. As much as possible, the lead researcher wanted to observe interactions that were not toned down because of her presence. To reflect diversity and balance in the data, the study includes a variation of experience level and a balance of genders in the former managers researched (see Table 4.1).

For the analysis, all transcripts of the interviews, the meeting notes, and the memos were open coded to detect emerging themes (Glaser, 1978). Through three rounds of analysis of the data, different elements surfaced and became a source of focus through successive rounds of study. The first themes that emerged were associated with the temporal process of becoming oriented with the self-management system, adapting to it, and then coming to a resolution about it. Therefore, the next round of coding focused on these steps in the temporal process, and from this came a temporal process model.

Second, as literature in post-bureaucracy was reviewed and the manager backlash associated with organizational efforts to promote autonomy (for instance, in Stewart, Astrove, Reeves, Crawford, & Solimeo, 2017), all data was again open coded and patterns about how the former managers behaved were reviewed, namely how much they tried to control their team members versus supporting their team members' autonomy. Resulting from this coding were three main types of behavior of the unmoored managers, which are detailed in the findings.

Finally, analysis started to focus on manager identity, reflecting that identity in holacracy could be associated with role titles, both those of the former managers and those of the team members. As a result, network diagrams were created based on the role titles of the eight focal teams at IT-ORG (see Figures 4.3.1-4.3.8), and trends in these networks were studied. The network diagrams were constituted from the software that IT-ORG used to organize its activities, where all members of each team and their roles were listed, including roles that were shared in common. Figures were created that represent these teams and roles for the eight unmoored managers studied.

Five indicators were selected as the most relevant for potentially understanding of how the former managers identified themselves in the self-management system, and how they related to their team as a whole:

1. How many roles the former manager held in their team, and of these, how many retained traditional hierarchical power.
2. How many roles the former manager shared with other team members.
3. How many roles the other team members held.
4. How many roles the other team members shared with others.
5. To what degree the role titles of both former managers and other team members reflected power status.

Trends found in the diagrams were assessed, looking particularly at whether the former managers and subordinates increased their roles, and to what degree they shared roles with other members. In addition, archival data was used from IT-ORG, which conducted assessments of each team in its "maturity" level in adapting to holacracy. Observers for each team rated the team's practice of such components as holacracy rules and meeting process, and on a monthly basis, IT-ORG released a chart that tracked team progress, which was incorporated into the research analysis.

Table 4.1 Informants

Name	Position in the former hierarchy	Gender
Jim	Senior manager	Male
Liz	Senior manager	Female
Bob	Middle manager	Male
Dave	Junior manager	Male
Ann	Middle manager	Female
Frank	Middle manager	Male
Mary	Middle manager	Female
Janet	Junior manager	Female

4.5 FINDINGS

4.5.1 The Unmooring of Managers

In the adoption of self-management, managers experienced a conversion in their day-to-day work from hierarchical to more non-hierarchical rules. In this regard, they maintained control over strategy and performance management, but partially or completely lost centralized control over other aspects of management. In this self-managing model, the managing and monitoring of the team's work was now shared between the unmoored manager and the team they previously led. Similarly, work and resource allocation became the responsibility of both the unmoored manager and the team. The leadership responsibilities that the unmoored managers retained related to directing team strategy and managing personnel and performance.

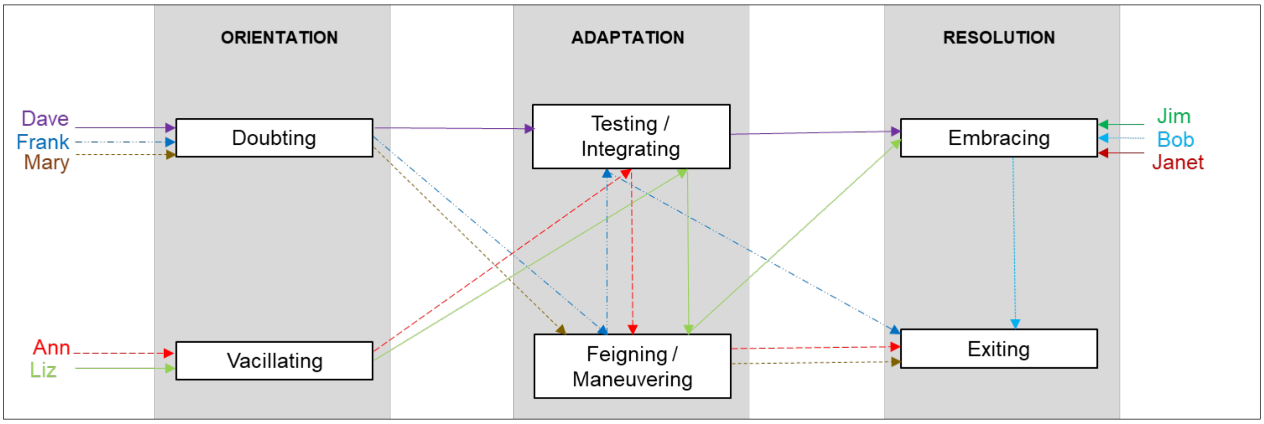
In investigating the unmooring of managers at IT-ORG, three paths of analysis were found that will be explicated in this section. First, a temporal process is described that the former managers experienced in the transition from hierarchy to a self-managing system. Second, a range of behaviors observed in the former managers while undergoing the transition is explored. Finally, a range of approaches is illustrated in how the former managers positioned themselves in the self-management system through their choices for their new roles and the relationship in the variation of how their team assembled themselves.

4.5.2 Emergent Phases of Self-Management Adoption

In the conversion to self-management, unmoored managers underwent three phases to varying degrees: ***Orientation***, ***Adaptation***, and ***Resolution***. These three phases of orientation, adaptation, and resolution are temporally organized, with one following the other. In the Orientation phase, unmoored managers tried to make sense of the non-hierarchical organization form. Next, in the ***Adaptation*** phase, unmoored managers experienced how the new organizational structure differed from hierarchy, and took measures to acclimatize to or resist self-management. And finally, in the ***Resolution*** phase, unmoored managers either accepted or refused self-management.

The shift from the orientation phase to the adaptation phase happened once the managers became satiated in the sensemaking process and understood the general boundaries and substance of their new environment. With no major new insights to be derived further, they moved on to the adaptation phase. The tipping point between the adaptation phase and the resolution phase happened when the managers had completed their experiments with and adjustments to the new organizational structure, and there were no new learnings to be gleaned. At this point, they entered the resolution phase. Through these three phases, unmoored managers took unique paths. Some felt comfortable with self-management immediately, skipping the orientation and adaptation phases, while others were more conflicted or contradictory in their approach. See Figure 4.1 for details.

Figure 4.1 Emergent Phases for Processing Self-Management Conversion



4.5.3 Orientation

Five out of eight of the unmoored managers underwent a phase where they attempted to find their way in the self-managing structure. The orientation phase is defined as the period of time between when managers were introduced to the self-managing structure and when they gained enough knowledge and skills in the structure to understand it and how to navigate within it. During the orientation phase, managers were often thrown into confusing situations that they did not understand, and they needed to make assessments to decide how to think and act within the guidelines of this new organizational system. *Orientation* manifested as either *Vacillating* behavior or *Doubting* behavior. *Vacillating* is defined as behavior by unmoored managers who were inconsistent in their conceptualization or practice of self-management. *Doubting* is defined as behavior by unmoored managers who had evaluated self-management negatively, did not think the system would work, and/or did not like how the system changed their role and work practices.

Managers demonstrating ***Vacillating*** behavior said they liked the principles of self-management, but were inconsistent in how they behaved with their team. For instance, Ann stated she liked that *"it's not all about the boss all the time"* in self-management: *"I think you are more innovative and more creative when there are more people in the room to come up with solutions."* Ann's sentiment, however, contrasted how her team experienced her behavior during the transition. One team member, Cam, said, *"I was given the role of Workload Balancer. But I didn't get to balance anything because Ann balanced everything. And if I made a decision to do something, she would question me to the nth degree. Do you really have time for this, can you do it, can you get it done? And it was always hurry up, hurry up, hurry up."*

Managers demonstrating ***Doubting*** behavior were more certain that they did not like the shift to self-management. For instance, Dave said*, "At the beginning, it was very strange trying to operate and understand what this was. And a lot of fumbling. Because we're so used to a certain way, and this is something new, and it got introduced, and we're like, we fumbled through it. And to be honest, at the beginning, I was like, I don't like it."*

One former subordinate recounted a rather extreme case of doubting behavior from a manager:

> **"**There's people who want to micromanage everything to death, and they should never be in charge of anything. I still remember sitting at the first holacracy [training] meeting. All 500 of us over at the GE building, or wherever we were, and somebody standing up and saying, 'what do you mean they manage their own work? I'm used to giving [my subordinates] a task, and when they complete it, they come to me for the next one.' I was like, that's exactly what management should never be. That would have been the first position I eliminated. I mean, because I also figure we're all adults here. If you don't know what your job is and how to do your job then you probably shouldn't have that job. If someone has to micromanage you to that extent, you probably need to grow up and get a different job or go somewhere [else]."

In the above example, the observed manager, who was being trained in holacracy, found it inconceivable that there would be a scenario where employees would manage their own work. Instead, this manager viewed their job as the person who delegates all tasks, always posted above subordinates in hierarchical authority. This manager seemed to doubt not only holacracy, but any system by which employees managed themselves.

4.5.4 Adaptation

Five out of eight of the unmoored managers in the study took steps to either learn the self-managing system or deform it to fit their hierarchical preferences. In contrast to the previous orientation phase, where managers did not yet understand the rules and norms of the new self-managing structure, in the adaptation phase, managers had gained enough experience and understanding to navigate the system. During the adaptation phase, managers made informed decisions on how to think and act, based on their gained understanding of the guidelines of the new organizational system they had learned.

Through ***Feigning/Maneuvering*** behavior, managers ignored the new non-hierarchical standards or more subtly tried to maintain hierarchical power while on the surface conforming to self-management. For instance, Frank, described by one of his peers as an *"authoritarian"* manager, allowed other team members to run the meetings in the new self-management process, but at times would interrupt during the meetings, overriding the meeting facilitator (his former subordinate), and speaking in directive ways that were discouraged in self-management. During one meeting, Frank said to team members: *"I have an expectation that you [pointing] and you [pointing] will be on it and ready to talk with expertise about it."*

This behavior seemed to result in Frank's team self-regulating themselves in order to continue to defer to him, based on field notes from a team meeting in 2017 where Frank was absent on vacation:

> **Keith**: I have a roadmap for the NSD. Frank has been working on it for years now. When I first started interning here. I made some headway and then it fell off the wall. [turns to Grant] Are you interested in making one for planning and design?

Grant: I think that would be valuable, absolutely. If you don't know where you are going, how will you get there?
Jake: The only key is that it matches up step by step to NSD.
Juan: It's one of those things, backwards planning.
Keith: In this case, it's grassroots, going from the bottom up.
John: I heard that Frank was asked to stop some of that work for now. I could be wrong.
We should check when he gets back to make sure. But I think that's a great idea.
[Keith records a task for himself to "Follow up with Frank about P&D Roadmap]

In the above example, it could be argued that the team simply wanted to coordinate activities with their former manager. However, the team had already ascertained that the requested task was going to produce value for their team. Rather than take the initiative to begin this work effort that they knew had intrinsic value, they opted not to start and instead decided to wait until their former manager returned to work to check with him about what they should be doing.

In a more sophisticated example of feigning, Liz supported self-management and in participant observations, was noted to use the proper non-hierarchical language when making requests of her team members. However, in a private conversation, she still referred to herself as the "boss."

Through ***Testing/Integrating*** behavior, managers endeavor to try new non-hierarchical behaviors and forego their old hierarchical practices. For instance, Liz was confronted by her former subordinate Luc when he noticed she was still repeatedly trying to tell others what to do at meetings. From Luc's perspective: *"I could see Liz have little moments of wondering how to take that, I think. And I don't blame her, at all. Because that's a really hard place to be… [Over time] I've seen her get onboard with that [self-management] actually. And kind of, get out in front of it a couple times. And it means something on a few different levels, you know, that Liz is willing to try this new way of doing things and willing to accept that means that you've got to cede control a little bit to your staff."*

Dave, who originally doubted the efficacy of self-management, became a proponent over time. In a conversation in 2018, he spoke about how holacracy as an organizational system played a role in pressuring another former manager to adapt their behavior:

> **Researcher**: Last year, you mentioned that one thing you did see that could be good about holacracy is that it performs a bit of a forcing function. The impression I got from what you described is, like, say a [former] manager [was] not naturally collaborative and they are more top-down, that holacracy actually put some things into place it makes them be more that way.
> **Dave**: Yes, [holacracy] helps them to transition to the thinking. It's a struggle. You can see the struggle that they have, because they are so used to being a dominant person, but those rules [in holacracy] are there to help them get away from that. It breaks that down and it keeps that straight line so those guidelines keep them focused on what the mission really is. That's why I believe that [the founders of Holacracy] put them in there because they knew that was going to be a big struggle.
> **Researcher**: Like checks and balances?
> **Dave**: Definitely checks and balances.
> **Researcher**: It sounds like what you've seen, with additional experiences [in the past year], that you do see that happening. That [holacracy] does perform that function?
> **Dave**: Yes, it does. I have seen it work. As a matter of fact, when we were talking about it earlier, about a year ago when we talked about person, that person has changed the way that they are doing things.
> [the researcher's guess is that this is about Frank]
> **Researcher**: Really? How so?
> **Dave**: They've eased up a bit. It's not more top-down. They're allowing their people to do what they're empowered to do. Does he still need some work? Yes, he does, but you can see the changes. I don't know if it is going to happen completely but you see the changes.
> **Researcher**: Yes, to even change a little is pretty notable.
> **Dave**: Exactly. Conversations are more pleasant with that person, because it used to be confrontational a lot, but the conversations you can see even happening are more allowing people to talk, and then they talk, those types of things. Even the critical comments that come out don't seem as harsh, and now they're constructive. It's a lot of changes that happened.
> **Researcher**: That's a lot of change I imagine there is more to go but still. All of these are very good beginnings.
> **Dave**: If you look for the changes, you will see the changes. That's the whole thing, then you can see everybody else is not on edge because of that, one person used to be the antagonist, and now is trying to play in the same part [on the same side]. That's good. There is joy in those things.

4.5.5 Resolution

As a natural procession after the Orientation and Adaptation phases, unmoored managers underwent a Resolution phase. All managers studied came to a final decision point about their assessment of the self-managing structure during the time frame of this study. Three out of eight of the managers experienced no perceptible orientation or adaptation phases, accepting the structure without issue, based on observations. Two other managers eventually demonstrated ***Embracing*** behavior after orientation and adaptation phases. Three managers underwent orientation and adaption phases, ultimately ***Exiting*** and leaving the self-management model.

For managers who ended up embracing self-management, a common theme across the managers was their passion for empowering others in teams. This often led to an ongoing inner dialogue about how to become a better practitioner within a self-managing environment. For example, Jim said, "*I'm constantly thinking about when people bring up issues, what is my behavior in, around that issue, and to what extent am I demonstrating hierarchical behaviors or self-management behaviors, and I try to make sure that I demonstrate self-management behaviors. But it's still hard."* Even though Jim was regarded at the company as a paragon of self-management, he was self-critical and adopted the stance of continuous improvement: *"I don't believe I have completely shifted power. I don't believe that I am completely embracing management, even though I am very much constantly thinking about that."*

One way that Jim exhibited trust in his team, embracing the idea that they are managing their own work fully without need for his supervision, was evidenced by the following field note in 2017:

> Jim mentioned that part of why the meeting today didn't happen is that Meg is not here. He said she took some time off because it's her anniversary, and he doesn't know when she'll be back. It's curious to me that Jim has no idea when Meg is back from her vacation, and he did not seem to have any tension at all about the

> fact that he doesn't know. I think this underscores how different Jim and Meg's relationship is from a typical manager-report relationship.

Surprisingly, Frank, previously hostile to self-management at meetings, reluctantly yet actively engaged with it at a meeting several months into the process:

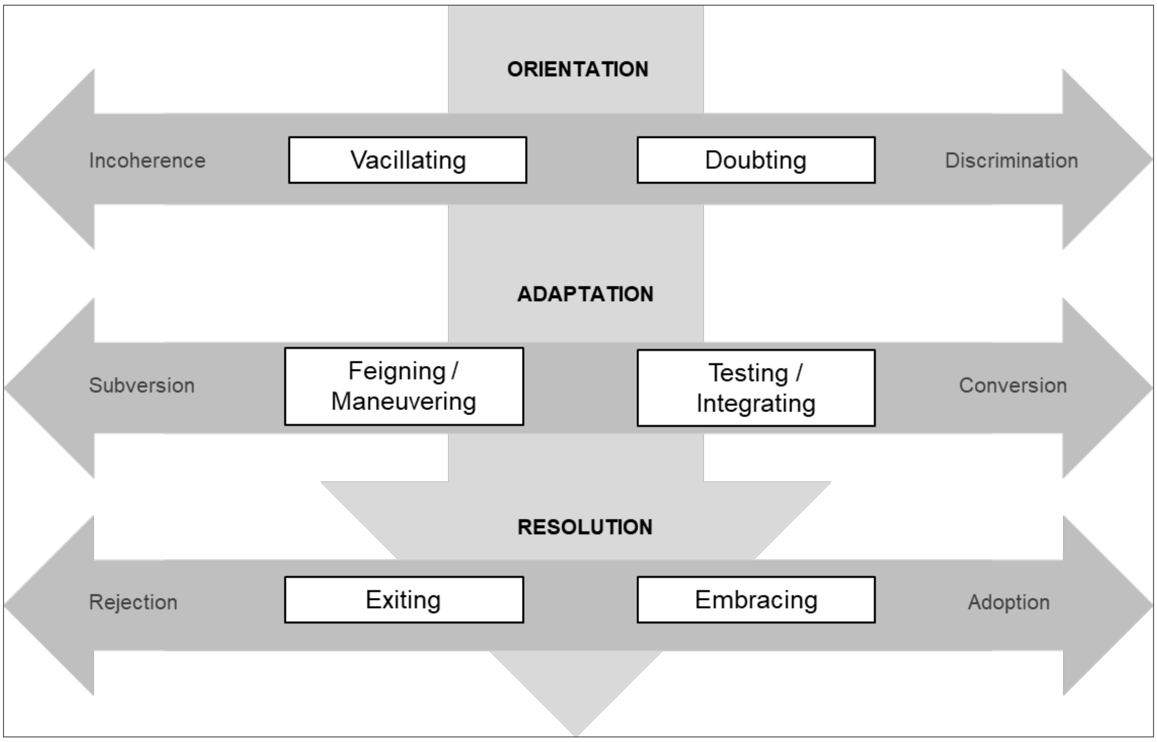
> **Frank** proposes new accountability to the Network Architect role: "Facilitating Network DAT strategic development, collaboration, deliverables, coordinate meetings with Network DAT members, capture meeting minutes, facilitate collaborative discussion(s) on agenda items."
> **Grant:** What is the meeting?
> [**Frank** answers, then other team members ask clarifying questions.]
> [The facilitator asks if there are any objections to Frank's proposal]
> [Frank seems to find it painful that his proposal be subject to a team vote.]
> **Frank**: Ow, ow! Start with John.
> [The team passes the proposal without objection.]

Those who exited self-management did so for various reasons. It was not always clear that self-management was a factor in their decisions, though based on data, it did seem to be a factor in some cases. Frank repeatedly told his team that they would opt-out of self-management after the year-long trial, and ultimately did. In participant observations, the lead researcher witnessed a meeting where Mary responded poorly to her former subordinate exercising his right to propose a new role for their team that she did not condone. She tried and failed to stop him from getting this new role approved by the team. After this agenda item, Mary seemed visibly humiliated and left the meeting before it ended, appearing angry. Mary exited self-management a few months later. Though Ann on the surface embraced self-management, praising it during her interviews with the lead researcher, her former subordinates stated strongly during their interviews that Ann did not accept self-management practice in reality. Thus, it was not a surprise that Ann exited self-management after about a year. Bob, who embraced self-management, eventually exited because his team could not come to a consensus about whether to continue with the new organizational system.

4.5.6 A Temporal Process Model for How Unmoored Managers Engage with Self-Management

From the data presented previously, clearly there is a wide variety of behaviors on the part of the unmoored managers. Within the main phases of Orientation, Adaptation, and Resolution, there are various tendencies exhibited by the former managers that are useful to further characterize in their impact to the organization. Thus, a temporal process model is presented for how unmoored managers cope with a conversion to a self-management structure, see Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2 Temporal Process Model for How Unmoored Managers Engage with Self-Management



In this model, the three phases are demarcated by tipping points where the manager completes learnings in one time period and moves to another. In the first dimension of *Orientation*, *Vacillating* behavior on the part of an unmoored manager can result in incoherent expressions and actions about the change to organizational structure. This *Incoherence* may reflect either misunderstanding or superficial understanding about the function of the self-management system, which can muddy the organization's attempt to change its structure. On the other pole, *Doubting* behavior is expected to result in the former manager tending to hold a bias against self-management. This bias can lead to *Discrimination* against the self-management system, where the manager declines to promote its propagation or criticizes it, which can negatively affect the attitudes and behaviors of others on the team and thus the organization's attempt to change its structure. On the other hand, *doubting* behavior may reflect rigor in striving to understand the self-management system, which could eventually lead to more positive engagement with self-management. At some point, with no major new insights to be learned, the manager completes the orientation phase.

In the next dimension of *Adaptation*, individual manager *Testing/Integrating* behavior towards self-management practices is expected to support the organization's adaptation of the new organizational structure. The unmoored manager's *Conversion* to self-management will likely stabilize the organization's change process and reinforce self-management behaviors in the team overall. On the other hand, pretending to espouse self-management while in reality enforcing hierarchical practices, or even sabotaging self-management through *Feigning/Maneuvering* behavior is expected to subvert the organization's ability to implement and propagate the new organizational structure fully. Thus, the resulting *Subversion* will likely have a negative impact on the organization's self-management initiative. Eventually, the manager exhausts all possibilities for adaptive behavior and moves into the next phase.

In the final dimension of *Resolution*, *Embracing* and *Exiting* behavior leads to adoption or rejection of self-management as the new model. An unmoored manager's *Adoption* of self-management will likely reinforce self-managing practices in the overall team. If unmoored managers leave due to the self-management change, this *Rejection* may destabilize the organization, as managers take their accumulated experiences, relationships, and organizational knowledge with them as they leave. On the other hand, in the long run it may be better for the organization to part ways with those employees who do not accept the new approach, to avoid misalignment and resulting inefficiencies.

4.5.7 Emergent Behaviors in the Self-Management Transition

Through observations, in addition to the three temporal phases, three types of behavior were found in the former managers when engaging with the new self-management system. These various behaviors were observed in the managers throughout the temporal phases. In one type, former managers regressed toward a controlling behavior. In another type, they struggled awkwardly across the boundaries of how to navigate the new self-management condition and not fall into the typical managerial behavior of hierarchy. And in the final type, they evolved to lead counterintuitively by disrupting old norms of control. See Figure 4.3 for these emergent behaviors and how they interface with the temporal process model.

4.5.8 Regression Towards Control

In the first identified set of emergent behaviors, instead of letting go of old managerial patterns, former managers such as Frank and Ann sometimes reinforced the behaviors they were used in a hierarchy. One way of the former managers to keep this old behavior was to act in ways that would maintain their dominance over their fellow team members. Another way was to micromanage the work of their team members, echoing the previous pattern of requiring a steady stream of updates from their subordinates.

Maintaining dominance. As previously described, despite agreeing to try working in the self-management system, Frank continued to exert dominance on his team in one observed meeting by interrupting the new process during meetings and directing team members to follow his orders. In another meeting, one of his team members Joe raised an issue, and Frank intervened, saying that the issue was “not our responsibility,” and that Joe should stay in his “silo,” which meant that Joe’s issue remained unresolved. Frank’s behavior seems to have led to his team to refuse to take action in his absence at one meeting, deciding instead to check with him once he had returned from a vacation. Additionally, the lead researcher observed one team member attempting to regulate another in order to pressure him to stay within Frank’s hierarchical expectations. At this meeting, Frank was absent, and Jorge proposed a new project that he said would automate a manual process that was taking Joe time to complete each week. Ben, in response, asked Jorge, “What’s Mike’s end take going to be on it?” Ben added, “Frank’s always like, your lane is there, stay in there.”

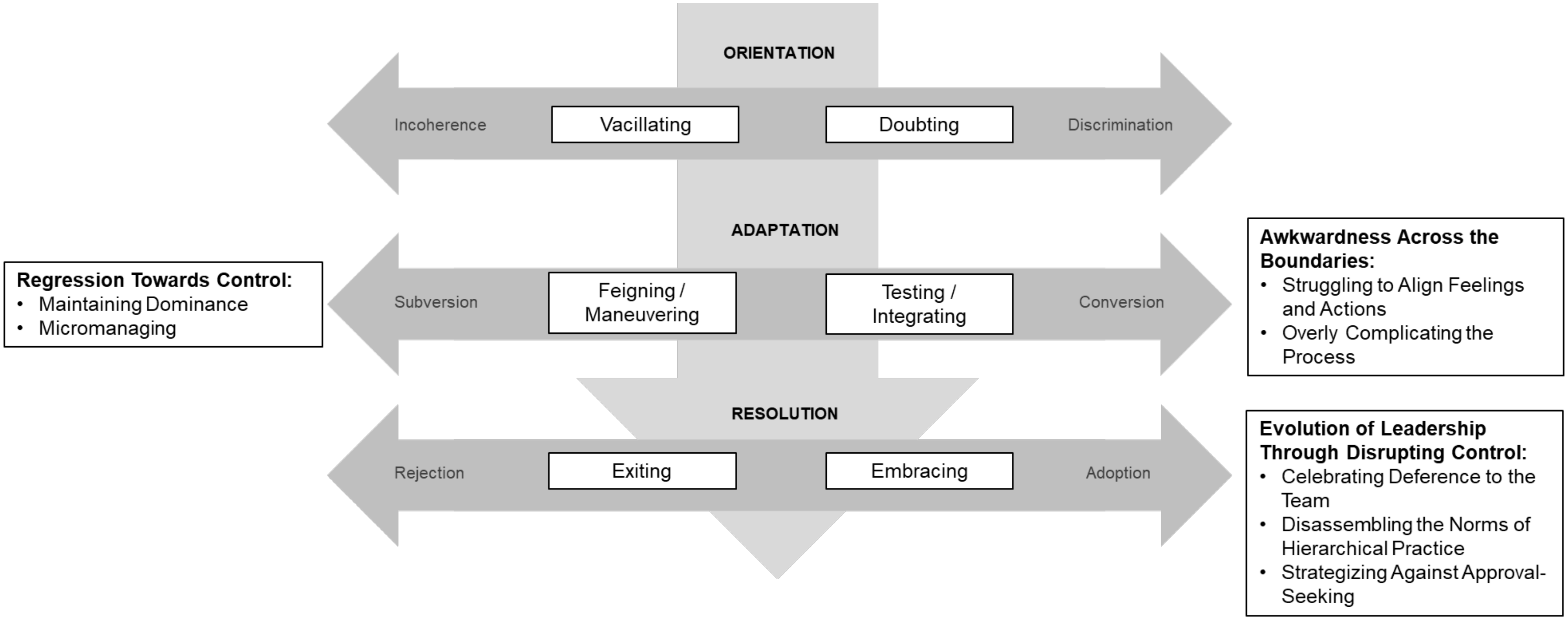
Micromanaging. In the new self-management system, each team member held roles and were responsible for initiating their own work and setting their own priorities each day. Rather than reporting status directly to their manager, they instead would update each other about projects and report associated metrics about progress at meetings. For managers who were used to a tight linkage of communication from their subordinates, this appeared to be an uncomfortable change. Based on observations and interviews with her team members, Ann reacted to this structural change by micromanaging her team. In addition to continuing the practice of requiring her approval, Ann also constantly asked for updates from her team members. Then during the course of several months, she tried a series of different task-tracking processes, none of which were effective and all of which were considered by her small team to be excessive. One team member Laura said:

> “We stopped our huddles. But then [Ann] felt like she wasn’t getting often enough updates. So then we added huddles back again. Now we’re transitioning into TFS to track our work, also tracking things in there. So it’s feeling overwhelming, feels like another thing to do. What keeps coming to mind, who is it for?”

At meetings, Ann often raised the issue of how to track work. The lead researcher observed discussions about whether to use TFS or a different software tool, whether to use a physical board on the wall to track tasks, and whether to meet three times a week to track task status. Ann repeatedly raised her concern that work was not being tracked in the team. The subordinate-manager relationship had been disrupted with the new self-management system, and absent that old pattern, the former manager struggled to feel comfortable with understanding the work of her team and her new role within the team, leading to micromanagement.

When former managers are dealing with a transition toward a self-management system, one way of coping is to backtrack to the more comfortable hierarchical norms, or regression towards control. In this behavioral type, the former managers failed to find a new way to navigate their work and instead clung to old habits of dominating over and micromanaging their fellow team members.

Figure 4.3 Emergent Behaviors of Unmoored Managers in Relation to Temporal Process Model



4.5.9 Awkwardness Across the Boundaries

In the second identified set of emergent behaviors of the former managers was to attempt to navigate away from the boundaries of hierarchical norms and towards self-management approaches, sometimes awkwardly. One way the lead researcher observed this awkwardness was in how former managers such as Janet and Dave struggled to align their feelings and actions with the new process. While they were accustomed to hierarchy, self-management felt foreign and uncomfortable. Additionally, the former managers were observed making work that would be simple to accomplish in a hierarchy more complicated in the self-management model in order to avoid hierarchical behavior.

Struggling to align feelings and actions with the new process. During the observation period, the lead researcher noticed that sometimes former managers behaved hierarchically as a force of habit, caught themselves, and then sometimes made on-the-spot adjustments. For instance, unmoored manager Janet began working with a new team member, Paula. Janet was sitting at a common work table, and Paula was sitting at her desk. Janet directed Paula to: "Come over here and join this discussion." Janet realized that she had issued a command and immediately backtracked. She then said she was just inviting Paula, explaining that Paula might be interested in what was being discussed. Paula acted according to the initial order anyway, jumping up and moving to the work table.

During the same observation, Janet complained about all the emails she had received on a topic. Paula, appearing to take this as a criticism about her work, explained that she had sent an email to Janet to try to respond to the request. Paula stated that she hates email, that "it's totally inefficient" and made it clear she wanted another process to be used, again veering into directive behavior. As an observer, this interaction appeared to stem from conflicting feelings Janet had about the new process and resulting inconsistency in her interactions. On one hand, in this observation and through several others, it was clear that Janet wanted to uphold the self-management canon of not being directive towards others. On the other hand, she sometimes reacted in authoritarian ways.

Sometimes unmoored managers resisted adopting the new self-management processes designed to replace hierarchical managers. In the case of holacracy, the most controversial aspect was self-governance, where teams formally created their own policies and roles through a detailed rule-bound process and elected their own leaders. For one unmoored manager, Dave, this self-governance process was unpleasant. This was first observed at a meeting where his team was electing one of its leaders, and Dave was being nominated by several people. Dave began actively campaigning against his election. Voting began in a public manner, as per custom, and in a half-joking, half-serious manner, Kenneth made a show of writing down the names of every person who voted for him to demonstrate his opposition.

Speaking with Dave afterwards to understand why he behaved in this way, he told me that while he liked the self-management approach in general, he described self-governance as “clogging,” “weird,” and “political,” where political to him meant issuing mandates and acting like a dictator. Dave added, “I guess I'm just not a very political type of guy.” He was clearly uncomfortable with the self-governing process. The lead researcher spoke with him the following year, however, and over time he had reasoned that organizational governance was needed in some way, and in self-governance, everyone had a say. He concluded that the political process of self-governance was more collaborative than managers handing down policies and decisions to their subordinates. For Dave, it appeared that his familiarity with the norms of hierarchy obscured his view of the expression of power inherent in being a manager, while self-management made power more visible when available to all team members. His initial reaction to this power shift was distaste before he eventually adjusted to the procedures of shared power.

Overly complicating the process to avoid hierarchical behavior. It was not only former managers that had to adjust their hierarchical behavior. Former subordinates were observed doing the same. When the hierarchical expectations of former subordinates collided with former manager attempts to thwart these expectations, sometimes strange discussions ensued. In one of the more vivid examples observed, at a meeting of a recently formed team, Pete (a former subordinate) asked Janet (a former manager) about how he should ask for time off work. The answer to this in a hierarchy is easy; the subordinate would ask the supervisor for approval. In a self-management system, this is not such an easy resolution, particularly in organizations that are trying to be thorough in weeding out latent hierarchy. In the case of Pete and Janet at the meeting, this question resulted in an extended, circular discussion. Janet repeatedly said there was not a process, and that Pete should simply let everyone on the team know when he decided to take time off. Pete repeatedly responded that he wanted to make sure he did the right thing, and he did not want to get in trouble. When Janet finally suggested that they create a team email distribution list for such notices, Pete wanted to know if he should send her an email first as a courtesy before he emailed everyone on the distribution list. This extended exchange is a profound indication of how deep the rabbit hole of hierarchy is in the consciousness of those who experience it. As an observer, the lead researcher was keenly aware of two things, 1) how inefficient this non-hierarchical process appeared, at least in the short-term and 2) to what extreme lengths it may take to truly shift a group's dynamic from hierarchy to the more equal participation toward which self-management systems typically aim.

Transitioning from a hierarchical organization to a self-management organization puts the boundaries of both systems into stark focus. Former managers may struggle with internal conflict about their feelings and actions with the new process, sometimes exhibiting latent authoritarian streaks even when attempting to embrace self-management. Former subordinates may be similarly disoriented and even attempt to re-moor the manager as a point of authoritarian focus for the team. To dodge such efforts, unmoored managers may have to overly complicate process in the short-term to make sure that old habits of hierarchy are not subtly reinstated. All of these machinations can make for awkwardness in the actions taken across the boundaries of hierarchy and self-management.

4.5.10 Evolution of Leadership Through Disrupting Control

In the third identified set of emergent behaviors, unmoored managers such as Bob, Janet, and Jim who seemed to adapt the most fully to the self-management system were the ones who were able to counterintuitively lead by disrupting control, the same mechanism that had previously given them power. These managers sacrificed the very mechanism that constituted the identity of managers in a hierarchy, and in doing so, they gained new utility in self-management.

Celebrating deference to the team. For instance as one example, Bob, the former manager, accepted and even embraced when he did not get his way. In a team meeting about self-governance, Chris had proposed changes to the accountability of the role of Circuit Minion. Using the procedures baked into the self-management system, Bob objected to the wording of some of the changes, because he felt that it overreached in its authority. However, Tara as facilitator overruled Bob's objection as being not valid according to the meeting procedural rules. Soon after that, Bob spoke out of turn, and Tara said pointedly, "Excuse me," effectively silencing him. At the meeting close, Bob said to the team, "I love that we're digging in on process and learning," adding he thought it was "awesome." After the meeting, Bob also supported Tara, the facilitator, who found managing the heightened emotions expressed during the meeting to be stressful. “You’re actually leading. It’s a hard thing to lead. It’s hard because people get emotional. Give yourself some room,” he told her encouragingly.

Disassembling the norms of hierarchical practice. Former managers who appeared to best adapt to self-management found opportunities to disassemble the norms of hierarchical practice. For instance, at a team meeting, Frances (a former subordinate) explained that she was formally allocated 100 percent to a project, but actually had time to accept other projects, which she wished to do, but did not know if she was allowed to. Frances asked Janet for direction. Janet held a firm line that Frances should make the determination herself, telling her:

> “I don’t know if I can completely answer that. I don’t like assigning - it’s up to you to self-assign. When it comes to resources, I specifically ask, what are they truly estimating they need? Based on that, you manage your own work, you can take the project, it’s up to you. I am not in the business of assigning. I find it really silly.”

At another team meeting, Janet made a point to open up access to a portfolio resourcing meeting that had long been reserved for upper managers previously. This idea seemed to amuse the rest of the team in its boldness, leading to a lively discussion amongst the team members. Through a self-governance process, they created a role for any member to collectively represent the team in the meetings and to share information back to the team. One team member joked that they should call the role “Portfolio Management Gate Crasher.” Disassembling the norms of hierarchical practice seemed to invite each team member to consider, ‘who am I now in this new way of working?’ and ‘what else might I do that I used to think was off limits?’

Strategizing against approval-seeking. As Jim was studied over the years of observations, the lead researcher found that he worked incrementally and systematically to counteract the tendency for those around him to seek his approval. As one example, at a team meeting, Janet, who had recently taken a new role with expanded authority, asked Jim to review her work, and it seemed that she wanted him to approve of what she was planning. Jim asked Janet “to what role” was she requested this review. Jim added that he believed he had “no accountability that gives me the authority to say no” to Janet’s action. Going to the technicality of the self-management rules in that moment functioned almost like a strategic chess move, blocking Janet’s bid for his approval, reminding her to forge her own path.

Additionally, Jim worked in the organization to change legacy bureaucratic rules that gave other people in his team less administrative power than him. For instance, he insisted that Janet have full spending authority in finance for $100,000 despite that typically she would have only been allowed $25,000. This change resulted in Janet having greater spending power in the organization and thus less need to ask Jim for approval, even as a superficial formality to sign off on a decision.

Finally, Jim said he tried to reflect on his shortcomings in leading without hierarchical power and without the assumption that others would defer to him. “It’s something I struggle with, every day. How do you express yourself as a ‘leader’ to give direction for the organization without it feeling like it’s directive and authoritarian?” As an example of failure, Jim explained that he had participated in a team meeting where he said in advance he was going to raise an objection to Neil’s proposal about a new role. As a technical point, objections in this self-management system trigger work towards integrating ideas and do not mean that the proposal is shut down. However, Jim’s signaling led to Neil withdrawing his proposal, which was not what Jim intended for him to do. It led Jim to reflect about how, in the future, he could phrase his thoughts better so that fellow team members would be less likely to view him as someone who needed to approve of their initiatives. It appeared that Jim’s approach, to strategize against approval-seeking, was a discipline that required ongoing effort, both because of his own hierarchical tendencies as well as those of others.

In conclusion, the unmoored managers who seemed most successful in the self-management system found a way to subvert the fundamental nature of their previous hierarchical authority and to enact evolution in their leadership through disrupting control in various scenarios. In some cases, it was through reinforcing in meetings that they were not in charge, thus celebrating their deference to the team. In other cases, it was through disrupting hierarchical practices such as closed meetings or resource assignments. And sometimes it involved strategizing against approval-seeking habits in meetings and through avoiding the authority whenever possible to sign off on others' work. The behavior of regression towards control is associated with the feigning and maneuvering occurring in the Adaptation phase earlier discussed. On the other pole of the Adaptation phase, the tendency for demonstrating awkwardness across the boundaries between hierarchy and holacracy relates to testing and integrating. Disruption of control as a practice of leadership relates to embracing holacracy in the Resolution phase. See Figure 4.3 for how these emergent behaviors relate to the temporal process model previously presented.

4.5.11 Emergent Unmoored Manager Positions in Self-Management

After presenting the phases and associated behaviors that observed in the unmoored managers as they adapted to holacracy, this study will further contextualize their process in how they made decisions about how to position themselves formally vis a vis their teams. In holacracy, formal roles in the organization are explicit and transparent to all participants, and thus are available to investigate. It was interesting to note that since any team member could propose new roles and each team was responsible for self-governing themselves, the teams at IT-ORG evolved differently. The roles that the unmoored managers chose and the roles that other members of their teams held can be understood as artifacts of self- and team identification. figures were created that represent these teams and roles for the eight unmoored managers studied. This visual presentation and associated analysis can add an additional layer to explain how unmoored managers coped with the organizational structure change and how their process impacted their relationship to power and identity.

4.5.12 Control-Based Positioning

Figures 4.4.1-4.4.4 are sequenced to reflect a spectrum of the most control-based positioning on the part of unmoored managers (see Figure 4.4.1) to the lesser control-based cases (see Figure 4.4.4). Those former managers who were more likely to regress toward control in their behavior tended to have few roles. They remained as Lead Link, the shared leadership role that they received by default in the new self-management system, and any additional roles they held reflected typical managerial duties, such as control over the budget, approvals, and resourcing (see Figures 4.4.1-4.4.2). Figure 4.4.1 shows this control-based positioning most clearly, where the former manager held only one title, and the rest of the team held limited, relatively isolated roles. While Figure 4.4.2 shows a greater number of roles for all team members, the former manager held three roles that similarly reinforced traditional managerial authority: 1) Lead Link, which owned strategy for the team; 2) Resource Champion, which owned the decision-making capacity to regarding who does what work; and 3) Document Process Liaison, which owned the paperwork process. These former managers siloed themselves away from the rest of the team, keeping their own roles distinct and not sharing any roles with the other team members. By doing so, this positioning somewhat protected their previous hierarchical status, even when faced with the flattening of the self-management system.

Of the unmoored managers, particularly Frank and Mary, whose behavior has been described earlier in the findings, adopted this type of control-based positioning.

Figure 4.4.1. Control-Based Positioning: Team 1 Role Network Diagram

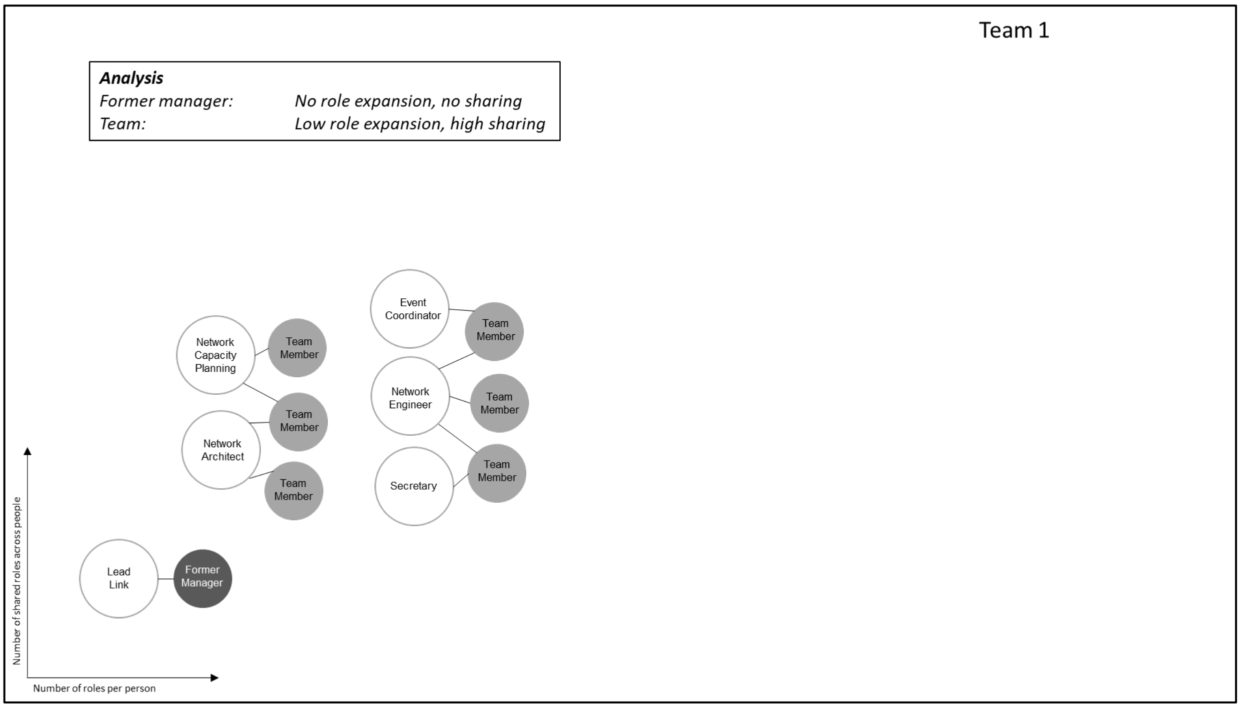


Figure 4.4.2. Control-Based Positioning: Team 2 Role Network Diagram

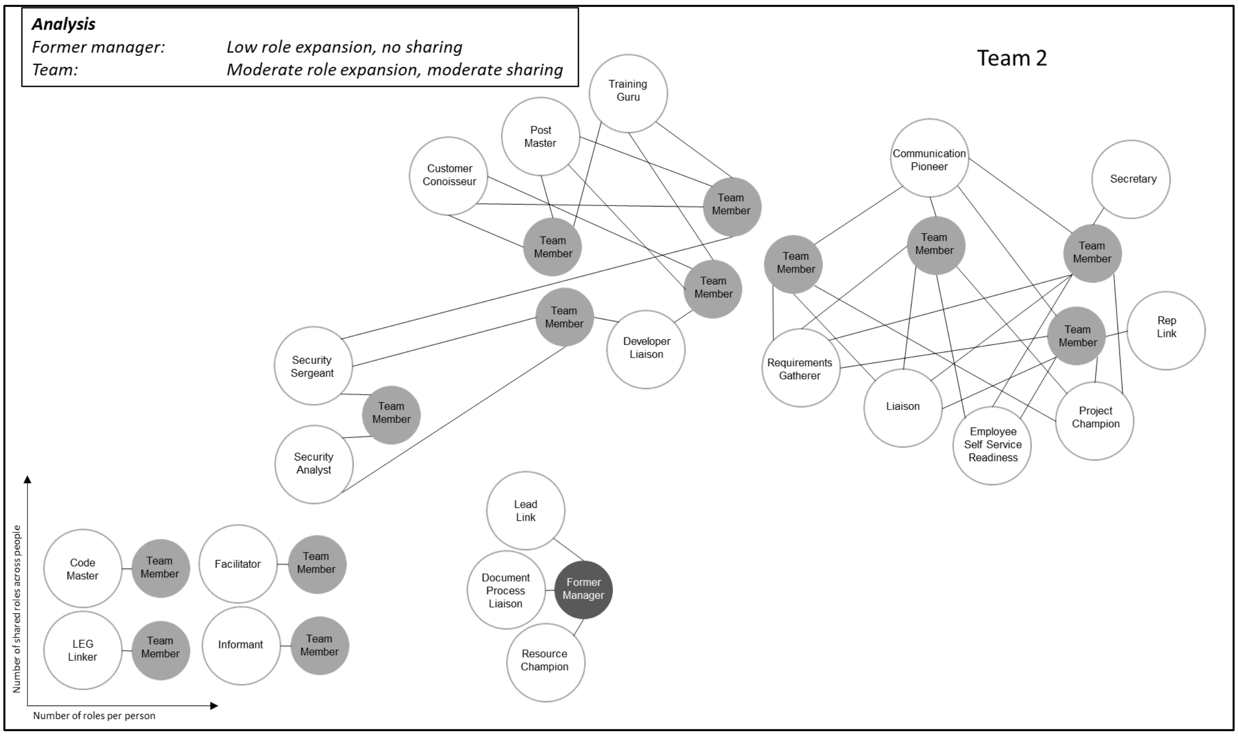


Figure 4.3.3. Control-Based Positioning: Team 3 Role Network Diagram

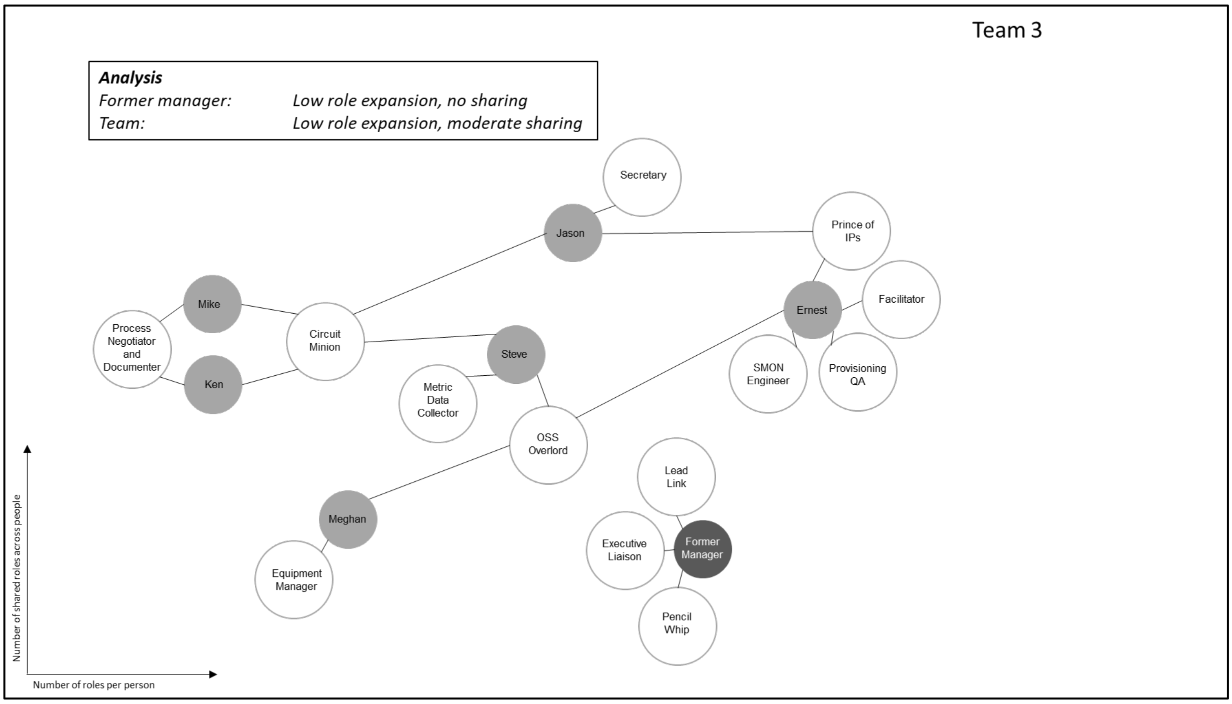
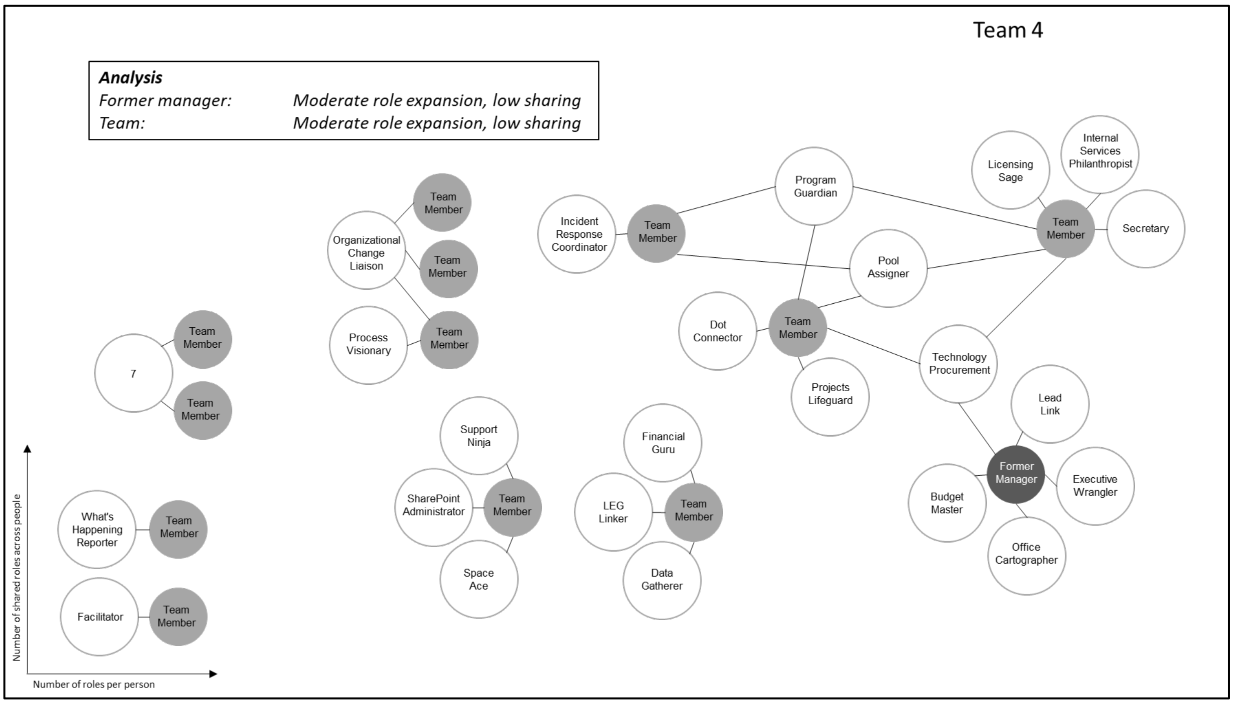


Figure 4.3.4. Control-Based Positioning: Team 4 Role Network Diagram



In these cases of control-based positioning (as shown in Figures 4.4.1-4.4.4), the rest of the team members were also likely to have fewer roles, which limited their own job-crafting abilities and made their work condition more similar to having a job and a job description in the managerial hierarchy. For instance, in Figure 4.4.1, one team member only held the role of Network Capacity Planning, and another team member held this role along with the role of Network Architect. This sparse role distribution stands in stark contrast to the role profusion described in the next section, or even in some of the more moderately control-based positioning of teams. For instance, even though Team 4 has been designated as Control-Based, one team member who was not the former manager exclusively held the roles of Licensing Sage, and Internal Services Philanthropist, and Secretary, and also held the roles of Program Guardian, Pool Assigner, and Technology Procurement, which were shared with other team members (see Figure 4.4.4).

In some cases, the rest of the team members were more likely to share roles, but this tended to reflect the sharing of common duties rather than a more dynamic sense of owning domains and initiating tasks within them (see Figures 4.4.1-4.4.2), most notably in Team 1 in the example given regarding the Network Capacity Planning role and the Network Architect role. In addition, the former managers were more likely to have role titles and responsibilities that reflected power status, such as Budget Master (Figure 4.4.4) and Executive Liaison (Figure 4.4.3), while their team members were more likely to have role titles that did not reflect power status, such as Licensing Sage (Figure 4.4.4) or Security Analyst (Figure 4.4.2), or that glorified mundane administrative tasks, such as Support Ninja (Figure 4.4.4) and Post Master (Figure 4.4.2). This expression of roles tended to maintain an invisible dividing line between the authority of the former manager and the rest of the team, despite having transitioned into a self-management system. The control-based positioning reinforced patterns of dominant behavior, where sparse, siloed roles echoed the artifacts of hierarchy. This was the case particularly for Frank and his team, which fit in this control-based positioning category based on role distribution, and where in observations, Frank dominated discussion and direction, and his team deferred to him.

4.5.13 Evolution-Based Positioning

Figures 4.4.5-4.4.8 are sequenced to reflect a spectrum from the somewhat evolutionary positioning on the part of unmoored managers (see Figure 4.4.5) to the most evolution-based cases (see Figure 4.4.8). Those former managers who were more likely to disrupt control and evolve their leadership tended to have many diverse roles. These roles sometimes reflected a degree of envisioning or inspiring new directions for the team, such as Cloud Advocate (see Figure 4.4.6), or embedded the former manager more deeply in hands-on work with the rest of the team, such as Commercial Product Engineer or Metadata Collector (see Figures 4.4.6 and 4.4.8). Former managers who were evolution-based were more likely to share more roles with other team members. By doing so, this positioning blended their work with that of the other team members, blurring the previous boundaries of hierarchical status. One example of a former manager exercising evolutionary-based positioning was Jim, who earlier was described as constantly questioning himself in order to rout out his latent hierarchical behavior. Another example was Janet, who, as explained previously, dissembled norms of hierarchical practice by resisting attempts by another team member to ask Janet to give her direction and also promoted other team members to take on authority previously reserved for the manager.

Figure 4.4.5. Evolution-Based Positioning: Team 5 Role Network Diagram

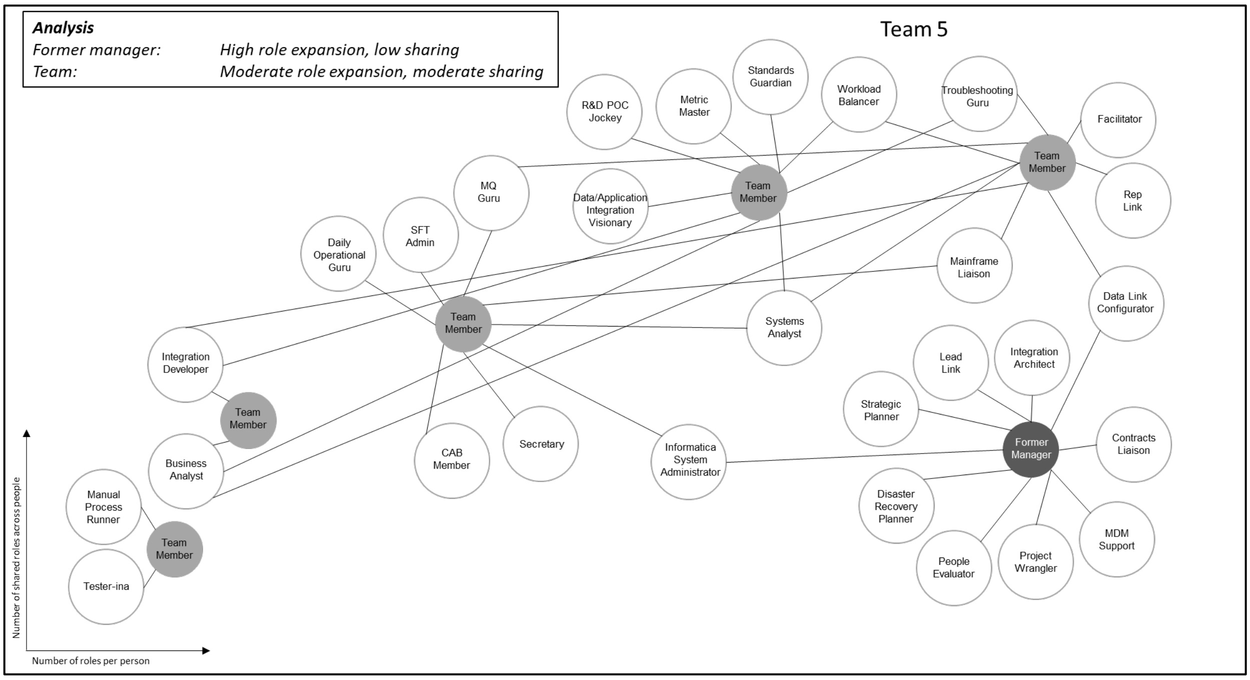


Figure 4.4.6. Evolution-Based Positioning: Team 6 Role Network Diagram

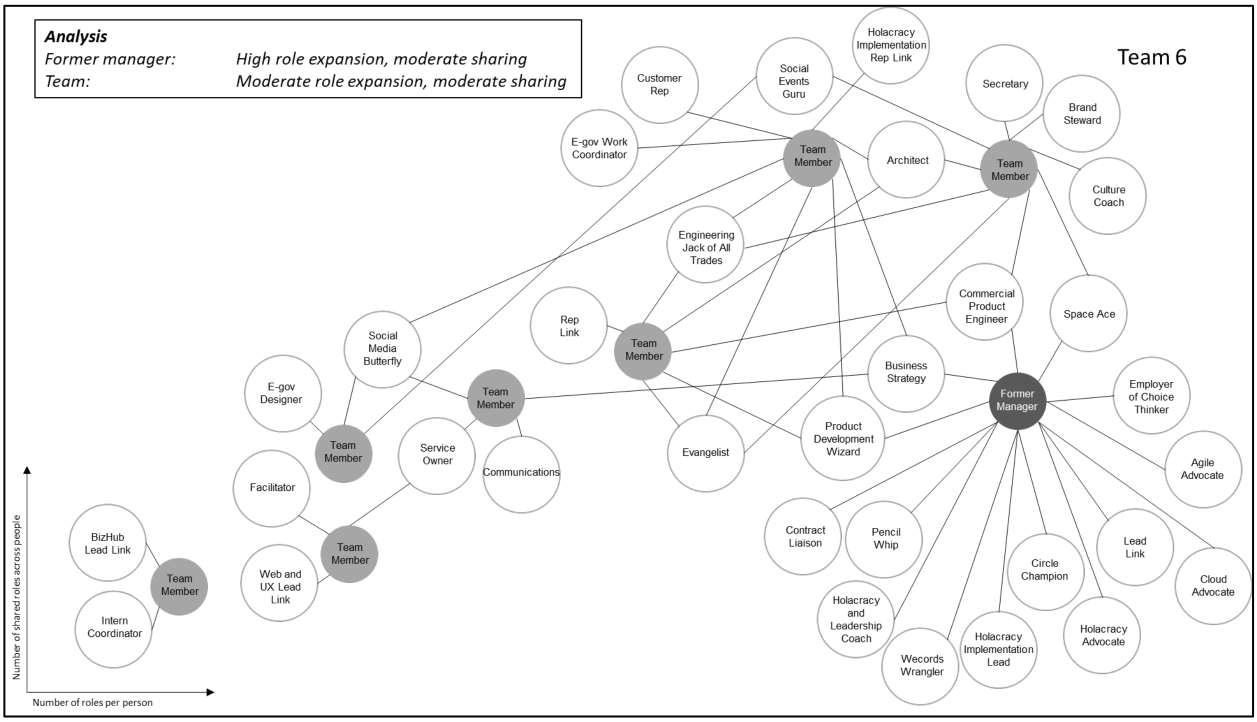


Figure 4.4.7. Evolution-Based Positioning: Team 7 Role Network Diagram

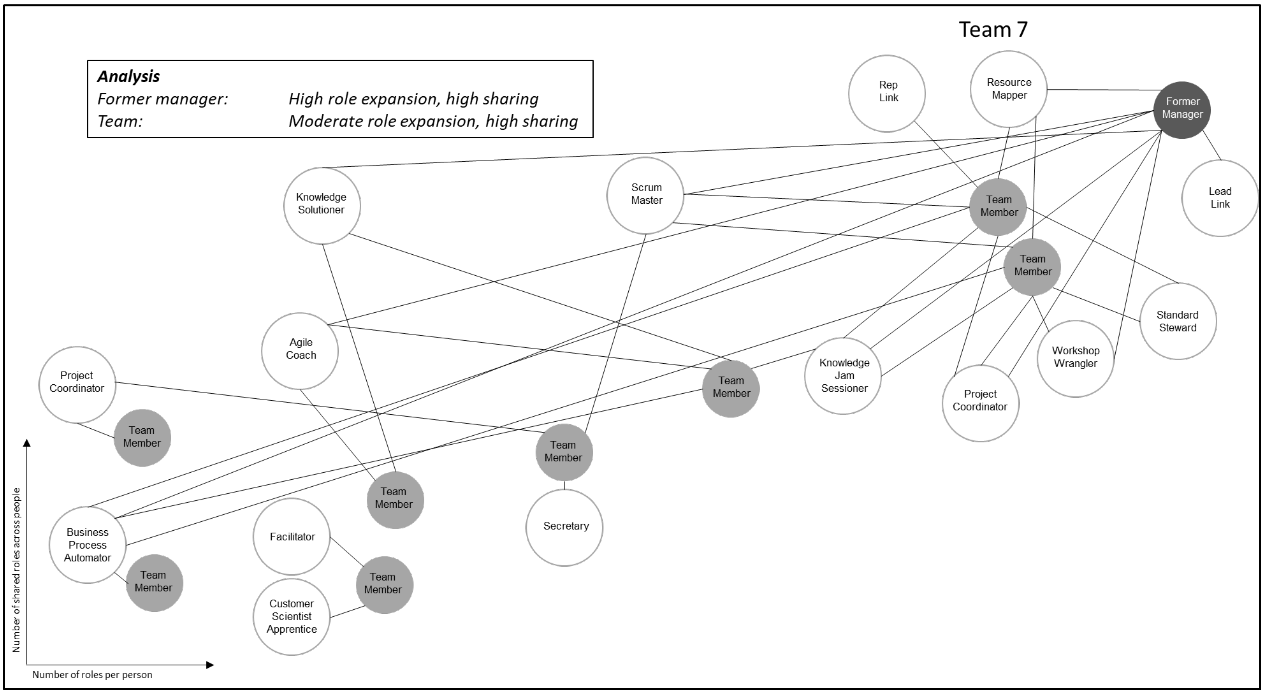
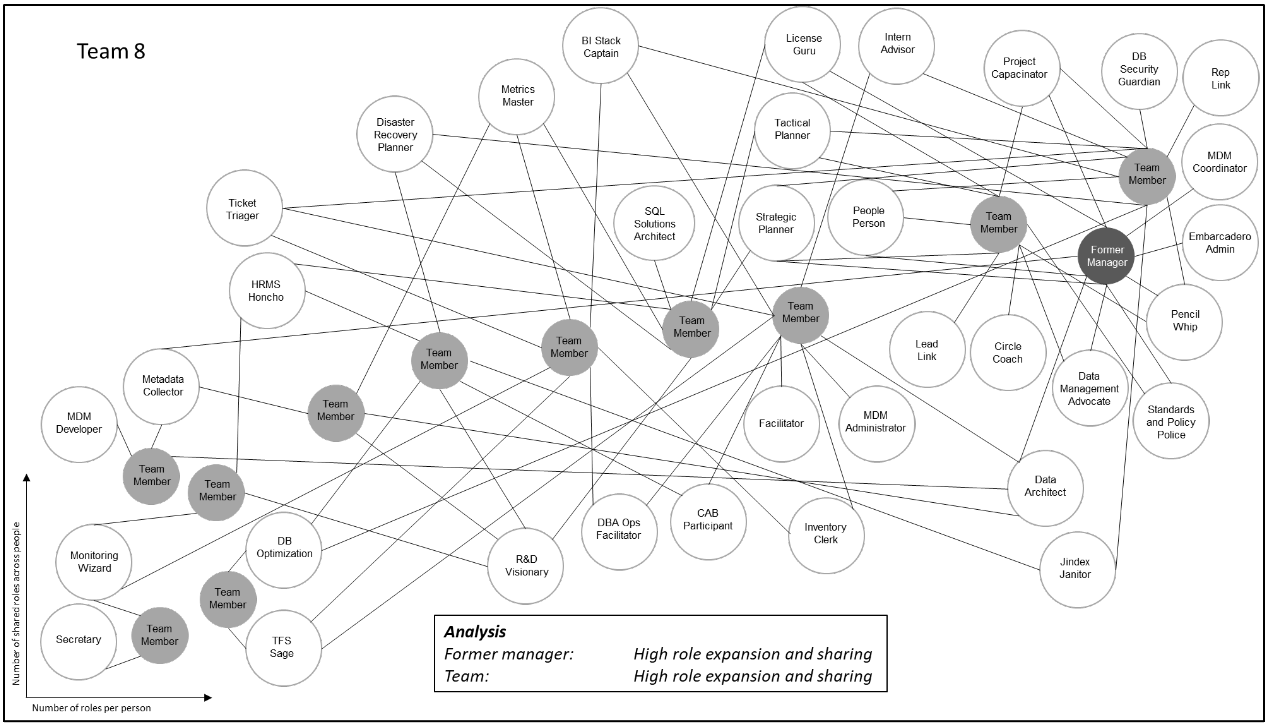


Figure 4.4.8. Evolution-Based Positioning: Team 8 Role Network Diagram



In these cases of evolution-based positioning (as shown in Figures 4.4.5-4.4.8), the other team members were also likely to have a high number of roles, which expanded their own job-crafting abilities and gave them more authority in their team. The team members were more likely to share roles in a way that reflected mutual interests and networked initiatives, such as Knowledge Jam Sessioner (Figure 4.4.7) or Disaster Recovery Planner (Figure 4.4.8). In addition, the rest of the team members were more likely to have role titles and responsibilities that reflected power status, which they sometimes shared with the former manager or held on their own, such as R&D Visionary or Strategic Planner (see Figure 4.4.8). This expression of roles tended to embed the former manager in a dynamic condition of shared power with the rest of the team. The evolution-based positioning provided support for the former managers who attempted to disrupt old patterns of control from hierarchy. Revisiting the case of Jim and his team, who fit this evolution-based positioning, it is perhaps easier to understand his hands-off behavior, given his team members worked in a state of distributed authority alongside him. With clearly defined, diverse, and shared roles, Jim was able to trust that another team member, who had gone on vacation, had managed her own responsibilities to such an extent that Jim would not track her vacation dates or even feel the need to know when she was returning. This evolution-based positioning also appears to support more team members taking leadership roles, in the case of Janet's team, as well as more team members in Jim's team having higher spending authority.

It is important to note that no one indicator or even set of indicators is a surefire way to understand how the former managers positioned themselves in the self-management system. There was variation in the purpose and specialization of the teams that could cause particular configurations. A former manager's personality or ambition (or lack thereof) might also play a factor in their role decisions a way that is distinct from their success in integrating into a new identity in self-management. However, enough consistency was found in this data to detect some consistent trends, described above. This analysis was been tempered and influenced by several other factors, including personal observations and interviews, and the anecdotal assessments of each team that were shared by various informants. The most dramatic difference was found between Ann's self-described ability to share power and her team's repudiation of her assertion, which has been explained earlier in the findings. In a similar but more subtle example, Liz and her team displayed outward indication that they were highly non-hierarchical, but in Liz's preserving her identity as the "boss" privately and the positioning of her roles vis-à-vis her team members, her team role distribution was in my estimation an example of control-based positioning. The trends toward control-based or evolution-based positioning provides information about how unmoored managers identify themselves in the self-management condition. Those former managers who continued to focus on control retrenched their identity around their old hierarchical role. Those who focused on evolution created a new identity in the self-management system.

4.6 DISCUSSION

The goal of this study was to provide an answer to the question of how specifically managers, as a significantly impacted category of organizational actors, cope with organizational transformation to self-management. In the result, hopefully processes have now been elucidated that managers go through when their organization shifts the balance of power from managers to workers. Furthermore, this study makes contributions to understanding how power relates to identity, how former managers can either attempt to maintain an old identity or craft a new one, and how manager role positioning vis-à-vis their team can visibly alter the trajectory of their organization's attempt to convert to self-management.

4.6.1 Implications for Research

The Relationship of Power to Identity. Research that explores the process that managers go through when an organization undergoes a conversion from hierarchy to self-management is scarce. The key contribution of this study is that it provides a deep exploration and analysis how power relates to identity, thus contributing to scholarship both about power (Clegg, Courpasson, & Phillips, 2006; Vallas, 2006) as well as managerial identity (Schilling, Werr, Gand, & Sardas, 2012; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). In the case of the unmoored managers, changing the hierarchical setting to self-management laid bare the fact that part of how managers may have identified themselves in relationship to their team was that they held "power over" them (Clegg et al., 2006). Losing this power, a core part of the managerial identity, created a polarity in how unmoored managers reconstituted their identity in their relationship to their work, team, and organization in the self-management system. This study found that some managers reinforced the norms of hierarchical manager, or identity derived through power, even in the new organization. This led to controlling behavior and positioning, and resulted in *regression towards control* through maintaining dominance over or micromanaging their teams. Others transformed the "power over" of hierarchy into the "power to" be facilitative and co-creative with their fellow team members (Clegg et al., 2006; Follett, 1918). This work temporarily resulted in some *awkwardness across the boundaries* between hierarchy and the new self-management system, where former managers struggled to align their feelings and actions in the new process and sometimes overly complicated process to avoid hierarchical behavior. However, the identity work eventually resolved into the *evolution of leadership through disrupting control*, where former managers celebrated opportunities to defer to the team, disassembled the norms of hierarchical practice, and strategized against approval-seeking. In taking these actions, some former managers were able to forge a new identity, practice behavior, and position themselves based upon an evolutionary approach to their work.

Opportunity for Identity Crafting or Maintenance. This research revealed that the terrain of self-management, at least in the context of a conversion to holacracy, appears to be new and not a refabrication of old bureaucratic practices, and substantial and not an ultimately empty exercise in post-bureaucratic rhetoric. Workers challenged their former managers. In some cases, the former managers resisted the power distribution.

Previous research has found that middle managers in post-bureaucracies struggle with their identity (Conroy & O'Leary-Kelly, 2014; Josserand, Teo, & Clegg, 2006). In the organizational conversion to self-management, this identity crisis can be even more pronounced. As the unmoored managers went through the phases of orientation, adaptation, and resolution, they chose to either cleave to old ways of hierarchical thinking or to adopt new approaches to a more egalitarian work environment. In this way, the temporal model developed depicts a series of inflection points for a manager to either forge a new identity or to stick with their old one.

In the first phase of orientation, while doubting behavior may seem to contradict a willingness to embrace a new managerial system, this study suggests that doubting will more likely provide the grounding upon which a manager will make an authentic conversion to self-management. On the other hand, vacillating behavior more likely results in a manager sabotaging their engagement with self-management. It appears that vacillating behavior may distract the manager from the work of gradual contemplation that seeds a new identity in the wake of the old.

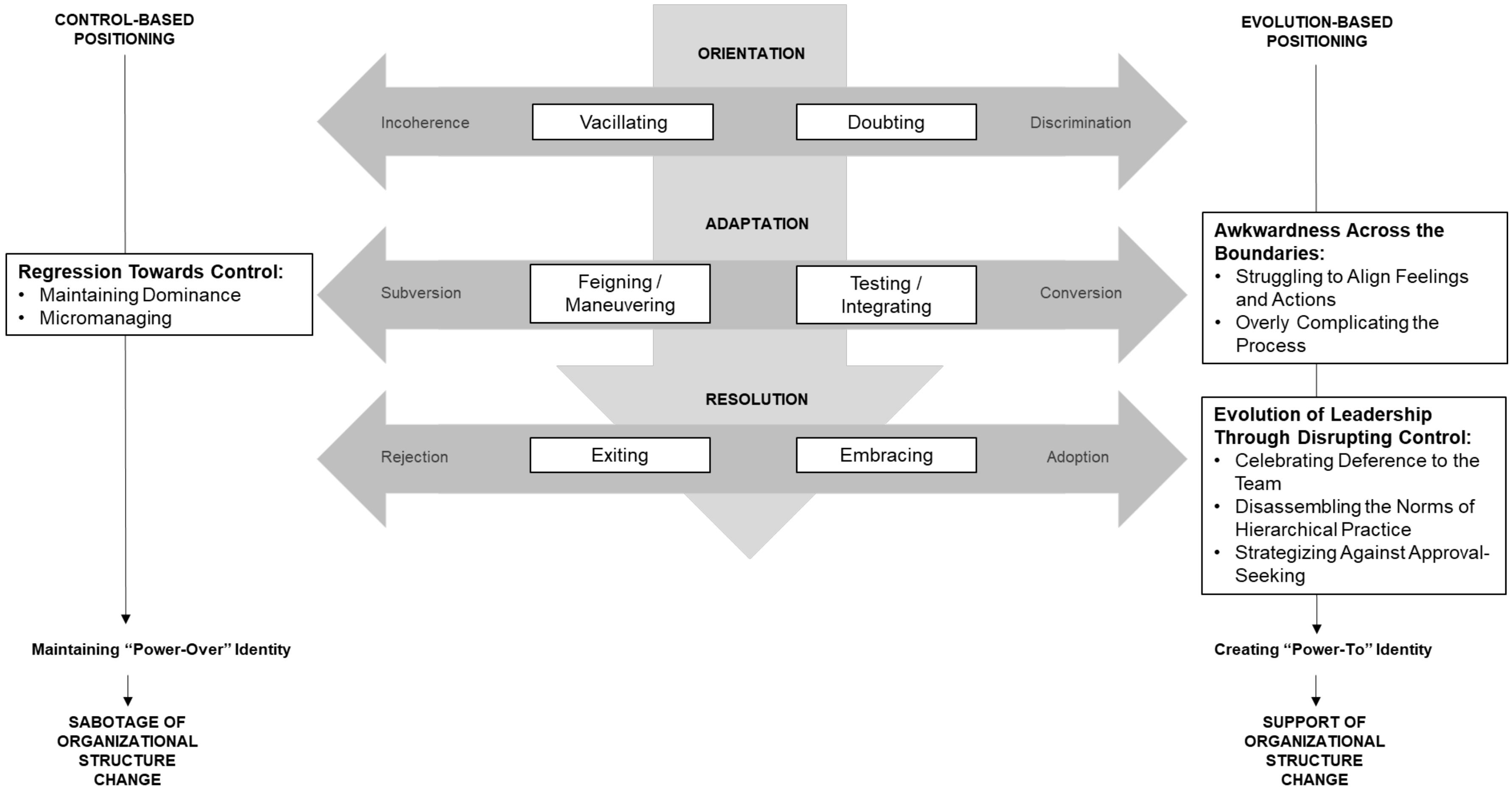
In the second phase of adaptation, the research suggests that testing and integrating behavior can build additional aspects of a new identity in self-management for the formal manager. On the other hand, feigning and maneuvering behavior may have the opposite effect, distracting the manager from incorporating aspects of self-management into a new identity and instead serving to reinforce old patterns of managerial authority and control. It is interesting to note that in this study, it was common for former managers to experience both poles of the adaptation phase, going from testing/integrating to feigning/maneuvering or vice versa. This suggests that the adaptation phase is a potent time for exploration for identity work. Finally, the resolution phase is the defining moment in which the former manager embraces a new identity within the self-management structure or opts out entirely, seemingly choosing to keep the old identity intact.

Impact of Former Manager Identity upon Organization Structural Change. Given that organizations increasingly adopt non-hierarchical structures such as self-management in order to become more innovative and to increase performance (Aime, et al., 2014; Csaszar, 2012; Lee & Edmondson, 2017), it is important to understand how an extant organization can bend its destiny from hierarchical norms towards non-hierarchical aspirations when it undertakes structural change. This study provides insight on how processes that former managers undergo can impact the organization's efforts to transform its structure, extending the work already advanced in this area (for instance, by Stewart et al., 2017) to a condition where managers additionally lost their original job titles and explicit hierarchical position.

In the study, some former managers adopted control-based positioning based on how they decided to number and name the formal roles they accepted in the new self-management structure. In essence, this dragged their teams back to an existence that appeared to be similar to the original hierarchy, shaped and reinforced by the former manager's behavior and role positioning vis-à-vis the rest of the team. This control-based positioning seems to result in the maintenance of the manager's "power-over" identity, which sabotages the organization's structural change by reverting the manager's team to hierarchical behavior and process.

In contrast, other managers adopted evolution-based positioning in their choices to proliferate their formal roles, distribute authority across the team, and to support their team to takes initiatives to lead. This behavior appears to reinforce the new norms of the self-management structure that the organization initiated. this evolution-based positioning seems to result in the creation of the manager's "power-to" identity, which supports the organization's structural change by encouraging and even inspiring all team members to fully manifest the autonomous and authoritative activities that are espoused in the aspirations of self-management practice. See Figure 4.5 for how former manager identity and organizational impact relates to the temporal process model.

Figure 4.5 Relationship of Former Manager Identity and Impact to Organization to Temporal Process Model



4.6.2 Implications for Practice

As a contribution to practice, this study can be used for some practical steps to ward off an immunity response by former managers threatened by organizational change. Anticipating their fear, an organization can take steps to provide training about how work and leadership in a flat organization is different from hierarchical behavior, and reskill former managers in this new domain. Coaching work could be done to preserve a sense of identity for former managers, supporting their work to define their worth to the organization outside of the context of power and authority, and instead focusing on their skills as integrators and supporters, for instance. There are new skillsets for all workers in self-managing organizations that would be useful to better understand. Lastly, this study provides some behavioral and role positioning cues to better understand when a former manager and team is evolving toward self-management, or when they continue to maintain hierarchical patterns despite the organization's impetus to change its structure.

4.7 CONCLUSION

In the saga of an organization's transformation to self-management, the neglected perspective of the middle manager may be a story of stress, confusion and disempowerment. Yet the imperative to flatten the organization is reaching mainstream business, to such a degree that some management scholars have cautioned that "no bosses" is a dangerous fad (Foss & Klein, 2019). Nevertheless, other larger organizations may follow the lead of companies such as Zappos as a way to stay competitive and innovative, leading to more conversions of middle managers to the status closer to that of rank-and-file workers. This research hopefully serves as a useful investigation for both scholarship and practice on better understanding the dynamics around this conversion, particularly how it effects the managers, their identity, and their consequent evolution or atavism, and how it impacts the larger context of their teams and organization.

5

Navigating the Space and Ethics of Ethnography

This chapter aims to address the third overarching research question of this PhD thesis, presenting early theorization on the concept of hermeneutic intimacy.

At my last job in the software industry in the US, I resigned in protest. The trigger was that I felt the company had treated my co-worker abhorrently. But I had been unhappy for a long time in my role as a project manager. It was like a bad relationship I couldn't quit. I enjoyed high tech and sometimes even the long hours that accompanied hard deadlines because I liked the camaraderie of team work. What soured me on the industry were the dysfunctional dynamics that often occur in the process of making software, a process of disillusionment that had started fourteen years earlier when I was a developer and had strengthened over time.

It didn't have to end that way. In many ways I was a good fit for the role. I liked focusing on the hard problems and doing what I could to solve them. Over time, I found that most of the problems were not about technology, even though I worked on complex software. The biggest problems were about people, often about how people were being treated. Once I became a project manager, I focused much of my effort around treating people well and trusting them, which turned out to be a powerful strategy. The other thing I was naively willing to do is work long hours to optimize team process. The most extreme example of this is when I stayed up all night to make sure teams in China and India were given systems administration support at a critical point in the software release process. I became known for saving troubled projects and regaining the trust of clients. Strangely, not only was I not rewarded for these heroics, I was often punished.

At one company, I was put on probation and ultimately laid off for speaking out against pressuring the developer team from India to work 12-hour days, 7 days a week, for months, in order to meet an arbitrary client deadline. At another company, a vice president from another division, many levels higher than me in the hierarchy, called me into his office and threatened me for integrating team process in a way that he said encroached upon his domain. An account manager at another company did the same. A

CTO at yet another company fired me when I was becoming too visible in my work with the CEO and parent company. Looking back, the best explanation I can give is that I was power blind. I did not bow down to the hierarchy and did not wait for permission to act. I mistakenly believed the common rhetoric that we as tech workers were empowered and that management would support our risk taking. I focused on solving problems first, worked with whoever I found to help, and I was outspoken. I stuck out when I should have receded into the background.

When I finally had enough, I broke up with the software industry, and in 2015, moved to Europe to leave the US 'empire' for a while and work toward my PhD in management. Given my history, it seems natural that I was drawn toward researching the phenomenon of how companies might function in a more egalitarian, autonomous way. I was lucky. Two organizations practicing self-management agreed for me to spend months over the last three years hanging out in their offices, sitting in their meetings, looking at their online interactions, and talking with whoever agreed to talk with me. The funny thing is they are both information technology companies in the US. So for a large part of my PhD time, I have worked in the same environment among the same types of workers I thought I had left behind.

My intimate knowledge of the software industry has been both comforting and confounding as I have begun to find my way as a researcher. One way it has helped immensely is to understand the context of what is happening in the moment and to make an immediate connection with those whom I speak. I know the processes. I know the terminology. I know the world and am acutely aware of the common frustrations. From my first day on the field, I felt certain I was able to understand things on a deeper level than I would have in an industry where I had no prior knowledge. Here is a dialogue snippet from April 2019 that flowed based on my understanding of historical software (names changed):

> **Liv**: The R4 system, which is our main financial system, is 36 years old. It is the oldest mainframe accounting system in the whole country, in the United States.
> **Eleu:** Probably programmed with Natural language on the mainframe.
> **Liv:** Not even Natural, it's COBOL.
> **Eleu:** Not even Natural? COBOL?
> **Liv:** It's Assembly and COBOL on the mainframe. When I started, I started 34 1/2 years ago, and my first job was to write reports against this brand-new system to replace reports from the old system. That bit got ripped out. As part of my career, I want to see that replaced before I leave.
> **Eleu:** That will be so satisfying.
> **Liv:** It will.

At the beginning of my field work, I tried to draw clean lines between my role as a researcher and others, warned by my qualitative research instructors to work in ways considered to be scientifically valid. I clung to my research protocol and regularly attempted to scour prejudice from my mind. Practitioner experience made my research life more complex by making my biases highly informed and personal. I knew the personality stereotypes and sometimes the inside jokes of software developers, managers, sys admins, and database administrators. In the field, I felt compelled to question whether my choices were informed by disciplined research approach or questionable assessments based on my history, because every interaction and observation resonated with a decade and a half of my past professional life.

But early on, I was nudged by my research subjects to engage. I was asked for my opinion about how meetings went. I was asked to contribute my opinions about how to proceed. I realized the thing I came to study, the non-hierarchical organizational system called Holacracy, required that I fully join in to really understand it. And I had a seed of faith that my inside knowledge had the potential to make my research better. In the beginning, this joining in meant being willing to not know what to do, at a point where I previously believed I needed to look and feel like I was in control. This stance long predated my entrance into the realm of research. Here is a field memo entry that I wrote early on:

> 27 October, 2016: I am having a real struggle figuring out how to position and what to do. I am used to being so circumspect and able to control a lot through other people's confusion but now I am just as confused as anyone else, these moments of clarity that I used to have all the time, I don't seem to have so much now, or anymore.

The next year, in early 2017, my memos reflect wading further into the big muddy of living my research. For instance, in February, I recounted how I ran into Meg in the elevator, and she asked me how I thought she should handle her elected role of facilitator for her team, a position that I noticed in meetings was causing her stress. I had an in-breath moment of internal conflict, of simultaneously not wanting to affect behaviors at my research site while also believing that my mere presence was affecting everyone's behavior. After breathing out, I shared with Meg my perspective that Holacracy seemed to invite people to speak openly about their concerns. Then I added that the truth is powerful, and sometimes it's like playing with fire, so it's important to read the situation and speak carefully and responsibly in order to not get in hot water. That second part came purely from my school of hard knocks as a practitioner. That moment of earnestness from me has garnered years of Meg's trust and conversations of deep insight. Is this valid science? Some would say no. But I know for sure that my relationship, and I would even say friendship, with Meg has given me rich perspective aiding in theory building.

When I began allowing myself to have spontaneous discussions with people, without an agenda and with natural pauses, our dialogue took on life and perspective that opened big windows between practice and theory in my mind. It was here that I took the leap from participant observation to relationship, and from distanced researcher employing ethnographic techniques to being an ethnographer who enjoys theory building. As one simple example, because of the freedom I now allow myself to converse with others, I sometimes can mark my own thought by speaking it out loud in the flow of conversation. In talking with someone, I enfold their ideas and add to them for my greater understanding, all while the recorder is running. At graceful moments, this has enabled me to do a level of data analysis in situ, while I am there talking with the person. Then I have this nugget in the transcript, and it can help me get multiple perspectives, that of the person I spoke with as well as my own, that I am able to analyze further through the process of integration.

My deviation away from classic case study into full ethnography started small and keeps getting bigger. I am entering my third and fourth years with my two research sites, and my inquiries continue. Though I am no longer tiptoeing around the subject of whether I am an ethnographer, the deeper I go, the more I feel that I have to think about my new role and work, which surprisingly draws deeply from my past. My former work as a project manager tended to give me a lot of responsibility without a lot of power. So I grew my capacity to inspire and to listen, in order to assuage frustration, connect commonalities, and build teams. Sure, I got good at schedules, sequencing, and task tracking. But I believe my most important work, the work that transformed failing projects into successes, was building trust, deepening relationships, and holding confidences across an organization. This core work continues for me in the academic setting. Now as a researcher, I build trust, deepen relationships, and hold confidences every day. Here are three themes I presently ponder as a new researcher:

5.1 Leveling the power dynamic. Though I study organizations that strive to be more egalitarian, no system is perfect. In a practice that purports itself to be non-hierarchical, when the familiar power plays happen, the hypocrisy is heightened and even more upsetting. I have found that as a woman, women especially confide in me. The privacy of the interview room and of me as a familiar face yet a safe outsider has meant that I have learned about many painful work experiences that tie into even more painful personal histories. I don't flinch. I don't pretend that I don't have feelings. I am aware that the audio recorder is on even through tears, and at times I opt to turn it off. In a transcript from 2018, I have me closing the interview, saying after a particularly pained sharing, "I think, if it's okay with you, I want to stop being a researcher and start being a friend." Their trust in me is moving, that I will make sure they don't regret what they have exposed. Impromptu, I started sharing my stories with them that are equally exposing in exchange. I have many options to choose from. This started as an impulse and has gravitated into a code in my personal ethics. I don't want to only take and use as a researcher. I want to share with others in discussions that are meaningful for all of us.

5.2 Double agent - holder of confidences. I have come to know my research subjects well enough over the years that they speak openly, even bluntly, with me around. Sometimes I think they have forgotten I am in the room. I have heard striking things that add new dimension to my research. Furthermore, in interviews I often hear mutual complaints that people have about each other. As spontaneous as I am myself in these discussions, I drill into myself the discipline to keep a straight face to not betray what I know and to not share what has been shared with me in private. Though I am not an adherent of the ideas of simple researcher objectivity and distance, I believe firmly in the practice of confidentiality and the precept of doing no harm. Occasionally, I agonize over whether I slipped in a moment off guard. I very much want to remain uncomfortable and watchful with staying on the right side of the line in this respect.

5.3 Right relationship with the organization. Recently, I was riffing on some ideas with the founder of one of the companies I study. It resulted in me giving a suggestion about a way to measure performance. A week later, he told me, in the presence of an Agile coach also employed at the company, that he had implemented this idea with a group of senior developers, and he was nervous about it because, given the egalitarian nature of their company culture, it was the first time in company history he had ever given them a directive. He left, and then the Agile coach told me, “Yeah, and they’re pissed,” chuckling a bit about the situation. I didn’t sleep well that night. What the hell am I doing? Over time, I had become accustomed to interactions with newly hired employees just out of university that took on the nature of mentoring. But I was in no way prepared for the founder of the company taking a spontaneous comment I made and running with it in a way that could change company direction. Though I have started reading a bit more on action research, I do not feel settled about this, in either an appropriate research standard or the right ethical approach. I trust that my approach will evolve over time with more study and interaction. It causes me to reflect that my research reality is so much more free and far ranging than so many other options I could have taken. It makes some moments complex, but it’s worth it to me in what I learn and the rare quality of conversations that I am able to have.

Looking back at my research thus far, perhaps I am working in a space of what could be called hermeneutic intimacy, where my expert knowledge in the field I am investigating gives me a cultural shorthand, a shared language with those whom I study. It is hermeneutic in the sense that I am intimate with the context and world view of my research subjects. I share history with them. Our conversations take on a dimension of a quest for shared meaning. It can be seen as intimacy in that based on my own extensive history in the field, I can complement or even reciprocate what is shared with me during interviews (Kirk, 2007). Perhaps I am engaged in these discussions in part as a way to revisit and make sense of my own past experiences (Romanyshyn & Anderson, 2007).

To detail the concept of hermeneutic intimacy further, I first work with the knowledge banks I retain based on my past experiences. Throughout the process of observation, I generate layers of additional context regarding my knowledge of the industry, of its professional norms, and my expertise about the tasks at hand that I am watching people talking about and doing. Then I bring this contextual knowledge into multidimensionality, where I build mental models of what is happening in the present, as well as the past and future, based again on my own history. I conceive of these processes happening in a space of knowledge.

Next, using these mental models, I think about what people I am around might be feeling. I spend time with these anticipated feelings, and think about what I would want to talk about if I were in their shoes, in other words what would be the most meaningful discussion for them. I then talk with people from this space of emotion. I am looking specifically for ways to touch them. I have found that this brings a level of humane service to research, where people may feel that I have supported, listened to, or helped them through the integrative discussions that we have together. If this is ever the case, I think of it as giving back, in honor of the gifts they have given me with their vulnerability and earnestness.

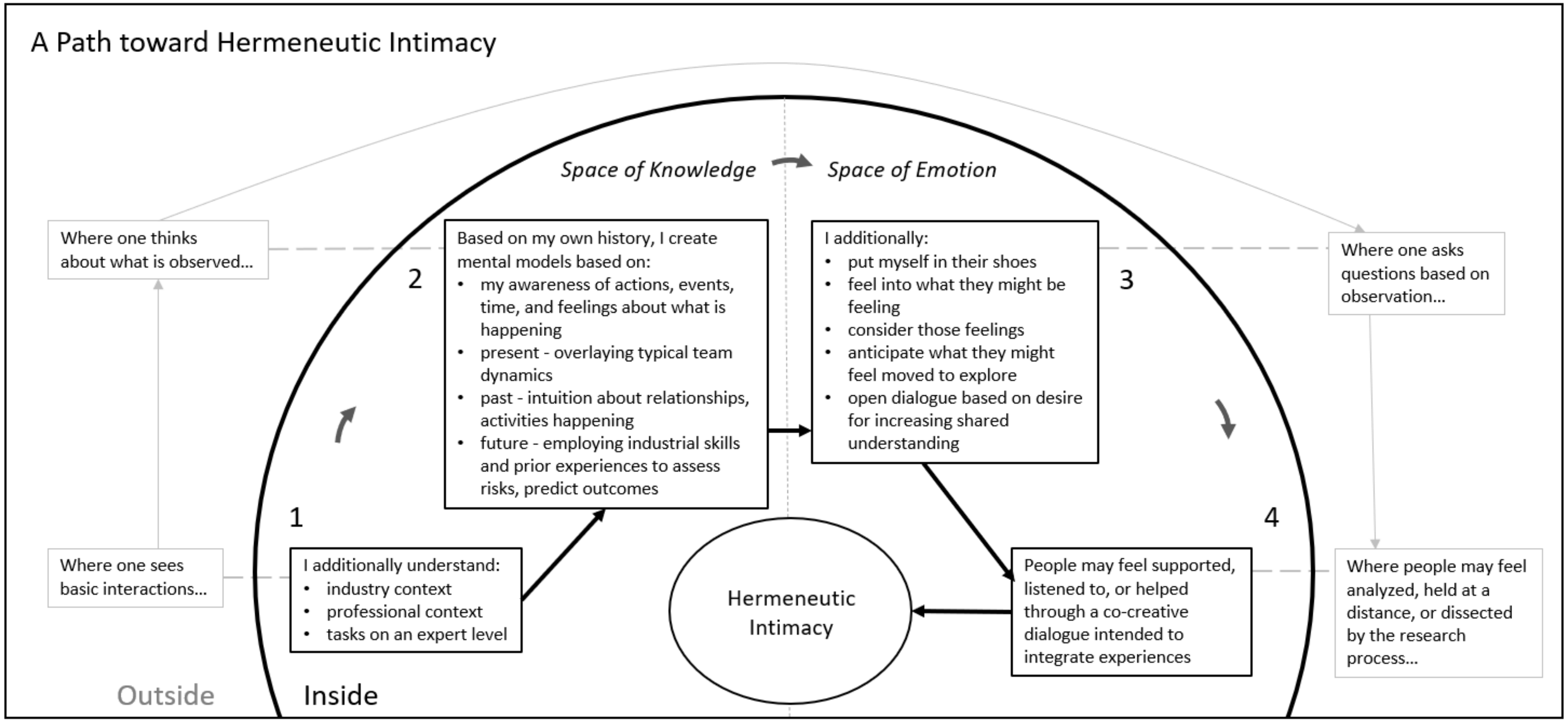
Hermeneutic intimacy (see Figure 5.1) follows a path that runs parallel to a more typical ethnographic approach, and it adds an interior experience that builds closeness through an interplay of knowledge and emotion, both inwardly and with others. This hermeneutic intimacy seems to tap into a deep well of exploration for understanding, from which flows rich and referenced narrative. I love Schutz (1953) and draw from his careful, profound work in human interpretation, while at the same time I challenge his paradigm of social scientist as disinterested observer. What is commonly viewed as the bias generated from involvement and intimacy becomes the very source of relational depth, which I have found to be deeply relevant and advantageous for my research. This is my thinking thus far when I consider how to navigate the space and ethics of ethnography.

I believe this idea of hermeneutic intimacy shares some ideas with reflexive ethnography, yet it is distinct from it. The main commonality between reflexive ethnography and hermeneutic intimacy involves the researcher's intellectual engagement with self—one's thoughts, background, perceptions, and beliefs. Similar to reflexive ethnography, hermeneutic intimacy involves self-reference, an inner dialogue and analysis as part of the researcher's work (Davies, 2008). Hermeneutic intimacy, like reflexive ethnography, assumes that the researcher holds a position, whether it be age, race, gender, or history (Chiseri-Strater, 1996). For both concepts, simultaneous acknowledgement of both the inherent subjectivity of social constructions and the vital importance of ethics through maintaining professional standards (Cant and Sharma, 1998) are vital considerations. However, there are two key differences between hermeneutic intimacy and reflexive ethnography. First, hermeneutic intimacy additionally assumes previous experience or expertise in the focal subject. Second, hermeneutic intimacy, unlike reflexive ethnography necessarily involves an emotional engagement with those people who are the focus of research.

Hermeneutic intimacy has some resonance with enactive ethnography, also known as carnal sociology (Wacquant, 2009; Wacquant, 2015), as well, with some differences to note. Similar to carnal sociology, hermeneutic intimacy lends itself to immersive, sometimes intense emotional experiences (Goffman, 2009; Wacquant, 2009). Hermeneutic intimacy also requires commitment and careful engagement through building trust with those being researched so they will bring the researcher into their world (Van Maanen & de Rond, 2017), where the researcher reciprocates through personal involvement with the researched (de Rond, Holeman, & Howard-Grenville, 2019). Hermeneutic intimacy is similar to Wacquant's philosophy that the self is a means of inquiry (rather than an object of study), capable of generating theory to the degree that we feel and absorb (de Rond et al., 2019; Hancock, 2009; Wacquant, 2015). There are two main differences between enactive ethnography and hermeneutic intimacy. First, while hermeneutic intimacy draws upon the body (de Rond et al., 2019) through emotional processing, it does not necessarily involve physical engagement like enactive ethnography does. Second, enactive ethnography does not require a conscious reciprocation back to those being researched, seeking a way of giving back to them or serving them, while this approach is central to the idea of hermeneutic intimacy.

I am young in researcher years. I don't know yet how my research will be received by my new community. I can say I love what I am doing and I savor my world, now that I have embraced being an ethnographer.

Figure 5.1 A Model of Hermeneutic Intimacy



6

Conclusion

This chapter contains the theoretical contributions, practitioner implications, limitations and future research opportunities of the research presented in chapters 3, 4, and 5.

6.1 Theoretical Contributions

This PhD thesis has investigated how post-bureaucratic organizations function without formal managers and generated theory in pluralistic bureaucracy. It has also examined how former managers in a managerial hierarchy cope with the change to self-management. Finally, it has explored the possibility that subjective approaches in research may aid understanding in the novel phenomenon of post-bureaucracy.

Accordingly, the first overarching research question of this PhD thesis was to empirically investigate how organizations without formal managers function. To address this first overarching research question, Chapter 3 has empirically investigated how an organization functions without formal managers, specifically how larger organizations flexibly reconcile autonomy and alignment. Chapter 3 contributes to theory by introducing a model of pluralistic bureaucracy. The first contribution of this model is explaining how autonomy and alignment in a pluralistic bureaucracy can be reconciled, which adds an alternate perspective to previous literature, which has portrayed the relationship between worker autonomy and managerial alignment as a paradox (Barker, 1993; Poole & Van de Ven, 1989). Our findings on pluralistic bureaucracy challenge this view and suggest that a potentially more useful lens is 'duality,' where seeming contradictions between autonomy and alignment coexist in a mutually enabling and interdependent state, adding to more recent research about duality (Farjoun, 2010).

The second contribution of our model of pluralistic bureaucracy is to theorize the enhanced interplay between formal and informal systems within pluralistic bureaucracies. In prior literature on bureaucracy, formal and informal systems are portrayed as inconsistent or contradictory (Gulati & Puranam, 2009; Heckscher, 1994) However, our model shows that in pluralistic bureaucracies, the formal and informal elements of the organization intermesh with each other, and rather than conflicting, informal processes enhance the effectiveness of formal systems and the overall organization by making it more flexible. This extends the research about enabling bureaucracies (Adler & Borys, 1996) and contributes to the ongoing debate between those who promote and criticize the concept of post-bureaucracy (Heckscher & Donnellon, 1994; du Gay, 2005) by offering common ground upon which ideas from both sides are accepted and integrated.

The third contribution of our model of pluralistic bureaucracy is explaining the critical role of normalizing disagreement in contributing to the flexibility and viability of pluralistic bureaucracy. As autonomous employees and a flexible structure with aligned purpose shape and serve each other in a complementary duality, tensions arise constantly to be processed. This ongoing processing of tensions is what reinforces the duality of autonomy and alignment, by empowering autonomous employees on one hand and by further flexing the structure to achieve alignment on the other. Through this study, a new role and understanding of organizational conflict is emerging, the idea of disagreement as a constructive force at the heart of achieving synthesis between autonomy and alignment that needs to be embraced by all organizational members. Though much scholarship on conflict has centered upon minimizing its existence, research has taken a turn to also consider that it is management, not suppression or even reduction, of conflict that is crucial (Rahim, 2017). Though empirical study is rare, scholars have advocated to consider the constructive qualities of dissent and deviance in organizations (Herbert & Estes, 1977; Stanley, 1981; Dooley & Fryxell, 1999; Warren, 2003). Based on our findings, heeding their call and investigating the power of disagreement may prove fruitful.

The second overarching research question of this PhD thesis was to empirically investigate how former managers experience moving from a hierarchy to a self-managing organizational form. To address this second overarching research question, Chapter 4 has empirically investigated emergent behaviors of unmoored managers during the process of conversion to self-management. This research analyzed how these managers reacted to the disruption of their managerial power as their organization began using holacracy. In the ways that the former managers behaved and the new ways they positioned themselves in their teams, I traced how they reconstituted their identities, either rebuilding their original power-based managerial identity or crossing the divide from hierarchy to holacracy and creating an identity framed in ideas of evolution and co-creation. Thus, Chapter 4 contributes to the fields of both power (Clegg et al., 2006; Vallas, 2006) and managerial identity (Schilling, Werr, Gand, & Sardas, 2012; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) in its analysis of how power relates to identity.

Additionally, Chapter 4 elucidated processes that managers go through when their organization shifts the balance of power from managers to workers, specifically in the case where they lose their positional status and job titles without losing their jobs. Previous research has found that middle managers in post-bureaucracies struggle with their identity (Conroy & O'Leary-Kelly, 2014; Josserand, Teo, & Clegg, 2006). Chapter 4 contributes to this research by richly describing, through the development of a temporal process model, the choices that managers can make to either attempt to maintain an old identity seated in ideas of hierarchy or to craft a new identity around the ideas of self-management.

Finally, Chapter 4 contributes novel analysis and insight regarding how the processes that former managers undergo can impact the organization's efforts to transform its structure, extending the work already advanced in this area (Stewart et al., 2017) to a condition where managers additionally lost their original job titles and explicit hierarchical position. The way a former manager behaves, adopts new roles and positions themselves vis-à-vis their team can visibly alter the trajectory of their organization's attempt to convert to self-management.

The third overarching research question of this PhD thesis was to reflect upon ethnographic research, particularly the methods of research that are suited to exploring phenomena such as holacracy. To address this second overarching research question, Chapter 5 has presented early theorization on the concept of hermeneutic intimacy. In addition to its usefulness for gaining insight about the inner workings and experiences of employees in post-bureaucratic organization, hermeneutic intimacy contributes to theory by offering a nuanced methodological approach for navigating relationship and self to produce high-quality research. This theorization adds to the methodological conversation about ethnographic approaches by finding a research perspective that is similar to yet distinct from reflexive ethnography (Davies, 2008) and enactive sociology (Wacquant, 2009; Wacquant, 2015).

6.2 Practitioner Implications

The findings contained in chapters 3 and 4 of this PhD thesis comprise relevant managerial implications for organizations contemplating or enacting a change to a post-hierarchical organizational structure.

Chapter 3 provides some boundary conditions for pluralistic bureaucracy, which requires complex rules and formal structures to involve multiple actors in the design and function of the organization. The advantages to pluralistic bureaucracy may be its flexibility in the face of complexity, its transparency, and its engaging and participative culture, which may have positive effects on the organization's ability to innovate. The disadvantages to pluralistic bureaucracy may be increased time and attention for organizational decisions, as well as its misalignment with employees who prefer to take orders.

Chapter 4 demonstrates that practical steps are available to ward off an immunity response by former managers threatened by organizational change. It is relevant to understand that managers have varied processes in sorting out their new identity in a post-bureaucratic context. Organizations may improve their change efforts by providing training about how work and leadership in a flat organization is different from hierarchical behavior, and reskill former managers in this new domain. Coaching work could help the evolution of identity for former managers, finding new ways to identify with their organization and team.

This thesis as a whole provides novel insight and empirical evidence about mechanisms of post-bureaucratic organization, self-management, and holacracy for practitioners. It addresses a rising need for organizations, particularly larger ones, to adapt to modern complexity by finding ways to become more flexible while staying structurally sound.

6.3 Limitations and Future Research

While this PhD thesis contributes both to theory and to practice, there are inherent limitations in the research. To address the research questions of this PhD thesis, all articles focused on one research site that adopted Holacracy as a single, extreme revelatory case. This methodology is suitable for studying under-investigated fields (Van Maanen, 2011; Wacquant, 2009; Wacquant, 2015; Watson, 2011) that lack theory (Yin, 2014). However, further research at other organizations and with other organizational systems should be undertaken to broaden understanding and as a basis of comparison.

It would be useful to identify whether previously disparate concepts such as self-management, network organization, lean organization, and platform-based organizations may be bundled under the term pluralistic bureaucracy in order advance further understanding across multiple research streams. Future research might consider where and in what contexts pluralistic bureaucracy works and how it may break down in some cases.

One limitation of this thesis is that the study occurred in a single country at an organization in the United States. Research in other countries and cultures would be relevant. Another limitation of this thesis is that this thesis is a study of a governmental agency. Research in other industries and environments may yield further specification or even new mechanisms based on contingency.

Additionally, this thesis advanced propositions about the effects of the unmoored manager temporal process on the manager's team and organization, namely the team's ability to become more autonomous and the organization's ability to embrace the transformation to self-management. Future research could provide insight into these potential macro-level effects.

In conclusion, it is my hope that the research presented in my thesis provides a useful foundation for grounding and anchoring rigorous and relevant future research.

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