

IMPLEMENTING HOLACRACY PRINCIPLES FOR INCREASED EFFICIENCY IN NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS IN LATVIA

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Abstract. The aim of this paper is to evaluate organizations that operate according to Holacracy principles, their potential benefits and challenges of its implementation, particularly in non-governmental organizations (NGOs). This paper offers a novel perspective on modernizing NGO management practices with Holacracy approach. NGOs are usually complex and dynamic in structure, therefore their “hard to manage” platform is an excellent to analyze contemporary management opportunities. The results of the paper indicate that the ability to adapt to modern changing conditions is a significant advantage for NGO organizations and a good example for other organizations, structured meetings could be mentioned as one of the key benefits. The research will address all key questions and provide conclusions and recommendations that can support NGOs in implementing Holacracy.

Keywords: Holacracy, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO), self-organization.

JEL Classification: L31, L22, M12, O15.

1. Introduction

From Henry Mintzberg (1979) to nowadays agile practices have become inevitably common because of “the ability of flexible organizations to re-configure themselves for each novel problem or environment they face” (Mintzberg, 1979). Harris et al. (2009) suggested that providing boundaries to human interactions is key to enabling creative, adaptive and flexible human interactions (Harris et al., 2009). This is especially important in self-managed organizations and teams.

This paper aim is to refine Holacracy framework by providing additional benefits for Holacracy users, especially in NGOs. NGOs are a magma of nested, partially overlapping and often short-lived hierarchies, rather than anarchy (Bernstein et al., 2016), is one of the interesting definitions of self-managed organizations’ hierarchies. As a main point some standard rules and norms may “make organization members watch one another instead of tracking customer needs” (Denning, 2014) thus decreasing the efficiency of these organizations. Recently, interest has grown for anti-hierarchic decision-making models (Hall, 2015; Noori & Tinaztepe, 2022; Wirth, & Butterfield, 2021).

Some authors see Holacracy as a solid framework also when working with modern digital tools (Dörr &

Lautermann, 2024). Holacracy seems suitable even for heavy industries where the need for adaptability outweighs the need for reliability (Ackermann et al., 2021) which is making Holacracy a very promising management tool for companies (especially NGOs), but there is a literature gap for Holacracy implementation in NGOs. From 2017 to 2024, an average of 110 new organizations joined the “Other activities not classified” Latvian sector each year, which indicates a stable interest in the sector (Zonberga & Putāne, 2024). Despite this, the NGO House representatives admits that organizations are often unable to continue their activities due to reasons related to lack of funding or overload of managers. The paper objectives are to overview current literature on Holacracy, identify key benefits for NGOs from Holacracy implementations, to reveal challenges and provide insights on organization readiness for this approach.

2. Literature review

Several researchers already employed bibliometric analysis pointing rareness of the Holacracy topic among modern management. Robertson’s research on Holacracy (created Holacracy in 2007 and founded HolacracyOne) and Laloux’s Reinventing organizations are underlined as

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fundamental research on Holacracy (Laloux, 2014; Gajdosík & Skorková, 2025; Robertson, 2015). Five most contributed papers are notable in discussing Holacracy as a focus research (Bernstein et al., 2016; Lee, 2022; Martela, 2019; Schell & Bischof, 2021; Schwer & Hitz, 2018). Nonetheless, various authors are pointing to the effectiveness of Holacracy as a management tool (Jack & Bayo, 2024; Robledo, 2024), the transition to Holacracy may involve difficulties or risks (Sazanova, 2024). Despite risks, they have a rare chance to improve organisational resilience, strengthen crisis management skills, and advance efficient crisis response tactics by utilising self-organisation inside a Holacratic structure (Makhanya & Vezi-Magigaba, 2025). A study by Glassman et al. (2020) examined 20 companies that adopted Holacracy and found that 60% reported improved employee engagement and innovation, but also its success was significantly influenced by various organizational factors (Glassman, et al., 2020; Jack & Bayo, 2024). This is making Holacracy an interesting modern research subject.

Another literature gap is that only a few scientists are discussing the efficiency of Holacracy especially for Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).

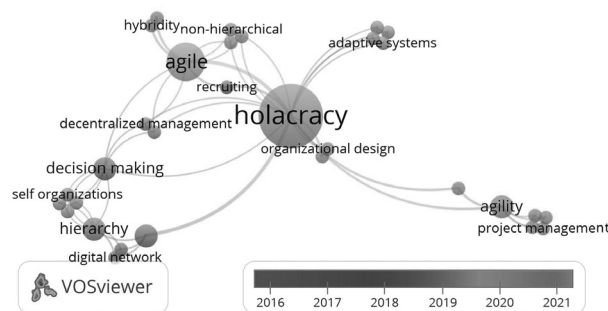


Figure 1. Holacracy literature results (sources: Scopus, VosViewer)

Overall keyword “holacracy” has 44 keyword matches in Scopus (Figure 1), while Science-Direct has only 2 direct matches for combination of “Holacracy” AND “NGO” (Scopus has 0 documents), so it is a very rare discussion. Even discussions mentioning both “Agile” AND “Holacracy” (Science-Direct has only 28 matches, Scopus has 13 documents) are seldom. In order to broaden Holacracy framework the authors were using also Lens.org and Research Gate database.

Although the Holacracy management model is relatively new and there are limited studies that provide insight into the benefits of self-organized organizations and describing the benefits to NGO organizations. For example, it is indicated that organizations in which employees feel more empowered have a higher level of responsibility, job satisfaction, motivation and loyalty to the organization. The Holacracy model assumes that employees are empowered to perform their duties at their own discretion, according to what they themselves consider to be the best way.

From the available literature research, it can be concluded that the Holacracy model can provide significant support for organizational development, including:

- 1) Clearly defined roles give employees clarity about their duties and responsibilities. This, in turn, helps to focus on goals and achieve them effectively (Laloux, 2014).
- 2) Less time is spent on solving problems, which is associated with the Holacracy idea that the problem can best be solved by the person closest to it (Farkhondeh & Mueller, 2021).
- 3) Clarity about roles has a positive impact on the level of employee commitment and engagement (Kamp, 2014).
- 4) The principles of Holacracy provide the opportunity to more conveniently adjust jobs according to the skills of employees, thereby reducing the number of unsuitable jobs. Employees who perform inappropriate tasks less often are more satisfied with their work (Elfering et al., 2007).
- 5) In self-organized teams, employees are better prepared to respond quickly to changes and participate in a continuous development process. (Lee & Edmondson, 2017).
- 6) In Holacracy, roles are separated from people. In this way, it is possible to evaluate how successfully a role is being implemented without making specific assessments about the person performing this role. This creates the opportunity to emotionally separate the person from the work he or she performs (Robertson, 2015).

3. Methodology

We started with qualitative research among experts to identify preliminary situation with Holacracy need, benefits and challenges in adoption for NGOs. Three experts were selected for expert interviews, who shared their observations, competence and knowledge about the principles of Holacracy and the suitability of non-governmental organizations for such a management approach. The interviews were conducted in November and December 2024. The interviews took place on the Google Meets platform, each lasting approximately 40 minutes (were recorded and transcribed). After the interviews, a summary is made with the experts' opinions on the suitability of Holacracy for NGOs, as well as an assessment of the costs, benefits and time invested. The suitability of each expert for the specific issue is described in more detail below. The results of the interviews are summarized in the Section 3.2. Summary of experts interviews.

3.1. Experts profiles and ethical approval

A business training trainer from Franklin Covey Latvia with extensive experience in training management, including on the principles of Holacracy and self-organized teams including NGOs, was selected as one of the experts. In recent years, the trainer has been giving lectures

and consulting to organizations that want to promote teams to organize their own work.

The NGO Support Sector Project Manager from the NGO House was selected as the second expert. The NGO House is a place where Riga non-governmental organizations can operate, organize events, and receive consultations on NGO activity issues and other valuable services. In addition, the NGO House is a place where organizations could receive help if they need any resources to increase the activities and capacity of the organizations. Therefore, an interview with the NGO House Project Manager provides a good insight into the problems faced by non-governmental organizations and allows for a better understanding of the needs of the organizations.

The third expert selected for the interviews was a representative from a pharmaceutical company that has been implementing Holacracy principles for two years and have experience in NGOs. The selected expert was the company's manager and one of the key people who implemented Holacracy principles in the company. The interview summarized the experience of a company that has practically gone through the stages of implementing the new system and has been actively practicing it for some time. The interview provided reflections on the effectiveness of the model, as well as suggestions for organizations that are considering implementing the Holacracy model.

Ethical principles including voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, potential for harm, and results communication are considered in research.

3.2. Summary of experts interviews

In general, all experts positively assess the suitability of Holacracy for non-governmental organizations. This conclusion is based on the fact that it is very important for non-governmental organizations to promote the active involvement of members, where everyone is ready to take responsibility and show initiative. The principles of Holacracy provide a structure for how organizations could implement this more successfully. It is indicated that Holacracy will allow organizational leaders not to overwork themselves in their workplaces if work is distributed more evenly among members.

Although Holacracy has several benefits, it is also emphasized that the implementation of such a management system takes time and effort. In order for Holacracy to work, it is necessary for leaders to change their thinking, which requires long-term training and patience during changes. Changing thinking can take even several years.

When asked about the costs, it is indicated that Holacracy can be applied in an organization with low costs. However, for successful implementation, it will be necessary to think about attracting a trainer, organizing training and purchasing a paid program. One of the most important aspects of Holacracy is identified – efficiency of the meetings. We tried to make more deep research for meetings statistics as one of the key benefits.

3.3. Structure of the questionnaire

Based on literature review and interviews, a questionnaire with crosschecking statements representing benefits and need, was created for employees of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) for quantitative research in Table 1.

Table 1. Statements about the organization's governance to recognise the need for Holacracy (source: authors based on literature review and experts)

No	Statement
1	I often perform tasks that are not related to my direct job responsibilities.
2	Performing inappropriate tasks causes me additional stress.
3	Performing inappropriate tasks reduces my job satisfaction.
4	I feel valued at my workplace.
5	I regularly receive positive feedback from my colleagues about my work.
6	I regularly give positive feedback to my colleagues.
7	I feel empowered to do my work in a way that I consider correct in my own opinion.
8	I feel motivated in my work.
9	I am committed to my workplace.
10	I am able to respond quickly to ongoing changes.
11	I have convenient tools for collaboration with the team.

3.4. Quantitative data analysis

This Section analyzes the results of the quantitative survey. The survey was conducted between December 6, 2024 and December 13, 2024). In Latvia only 865 Civic Society Organizations are identified by The Latvian Civic Alliance, 81.2% of organizations have no employees, highlighting their difficulty in providing feedback (Latvian Civic Alliance, 2024). For the survey a purposive method for 186 active organizations was used, unfortunately results were received only from 50 NGO associations as well as additional results published on the social networks.

As a result, 56 respondents ($n = 56$) participated in the survey, but only 26 of the respondents represented Civic Society Organizations were valid (sample size results showing recommended 50 respondents, population size 186, confidence 90%, (Roasoft, n.d.)). The age distribution of respondents is shown in Figure 2. According to the results, it can be seen that the majority of respondents – 61.8% are aged 18 to 35.

This aspect is important to take into account when analyzing the results, because generational differences affect attitudes and demands towards work. It is believed that representatives of the younger generations adapt to changes more easily and have a different perception of the importance of work in their lives. It is concluded that for these generations (Generation Z and millennials) it is more important for work to give meaning, it is important

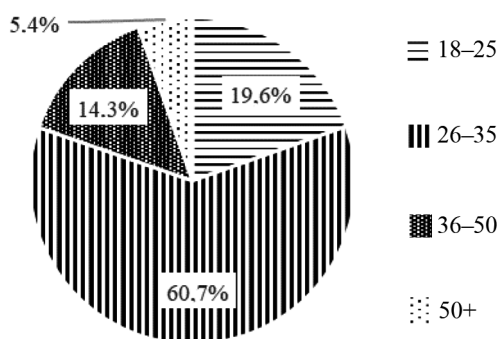


Figure 2. Distribution of respondents by age group (source: survey)

to receive fulfilment at work. By type of organization, 43% ($n = 26$) of the completed questionnaires represent non-governmental and non-profit organizations, while the remaining 57% ($n = 30$) represent other types of organizations. The survey respondents represent a wide range of industries, including education, IT, construction, marketing, logistics, charity, telecommunications, pharmacy, banking, social entrepreneurship and others. Although the paper researches the implementation of Holacracy in non-governmental organizations in depth, the other responses also provide valuable insight into the attitude of employees towards organizational management. It is also valuable to compare the responses between representatives of different types of organizations and sectors.

4. Findings and results

The results provided by non-governmental organizations are discussed below. Table 2 summarizes the responses provided by non-governmental organizations regarding the frequency, duration and satisfaction with their meetings. The questionnaire asked how often meetings are organized (1–2x per week; 3–5x per week; every other week), what is the duration of the meetings (10–30 min; up to 1h; 1–2h; 2h+) and what is the satisfaction with the meetings (on a scale from 1 to 10).

The average duration is calculated by assuming 90 min as the average duration in cases where meetings last 1–2h, 45 min when meetings last up to 1h, 20 min when meetings last 10–30 min and 130 min when meetings last longer than 2h. According to the results, it can be seen that most often (12 respondents) meetings are organized 1–2 times a week, and most often last 1–2h. The average duration of meetings is 1h, but the average level of satisfaction with meetings is 7.6. The group with the highest level of satisfaction has meetings organized 3–5 times a week, and the average meeting duration is 40 min. Meetings are organized every other week for eight of the respondents. The average duration of these meetings is 1h 15 min, but the average satisfaction level is 5.8. From the results, it can be concluded that the most satisfied with meetings are those for whom meetings are organized 3–5x a week, while the lowest level of satisfaction is

in the group where meetings are organized every other week.

Table 2. Meeting evaluation (source: survey)

Fre-quency	Number	Meeting duration	Average duration	Average satisfaction level
1–2 times	12	1–2h (6); up to 1h (4); 10–30 min (2)	1h	7.6
3–5 times	6	Up to 1h (5); 10–30 min (1)	40 min	8.1
Every other week	8	10–30 min (2); up to 1h (1); 1–2h (3); 2h+ (2)	1h 15 min	5.8

Holacracy involves a weekly 1-hour meeting. If additional meetings are needed, employees can organize them among themselves. A structured meeting process in Holacracy ensures clarity, efficiency, and focus. The clearly defined structure helps to stick to pre-determined priorities, keeping discussions action-oriented, while promoting transparency and accountability within the team.

Table 3. Summary of survey results (source: survey)

Assertion	Rather disagree and disagree	I rather agree and agree
Duties and responsibilities are clearly defined.	3	23
Tasks are delegated in a clear manner.	3	23
Managers oversee the process without excessive supervision.	4	22
It is easy to implement change in the organization.	10	16
Everyone has the opportunity to propose changes.	4	22
Employees have the autonomy to make their own decisions about how to carry out their duties.	3	23
I am clear about what I can expect from my colleagues.	1	25
I am clear about what others expect of me.	1	25
It is clear to me what everyone is responsible for.	1	25
Job description is easy to change as needed.	6	20
The organization is ready to adapt to change.	2	24
My performance is clearly listed.	4	22

Due to remote work, meetings are often a time for employees to communicate with each other about non-work-related matters. It may be best to separate

work conversations from personal conversations to keep meeting time as productive as possible. The following summarizes the results of the survey questions related to employees' attitudes towards the effectiveness of management in their workplace. Table 3 contains a series of statements prepared based on the benefits described on the Holacracy website. For example, it is mentioned that the principles of Holacracy will help to define duties and responsibilities more clearly; Holacracy helps to delegate tasks in a clear way; it facilitates the implementation of changes in the organization, and many other benefits summarized in the survey statements.

The results show that ten respondents indicated that they disagreed or rather disagreed with the statement that it is easy to implement change in their organization. This statement received the highest number of negative responses. The ability of an organization to change and adapt to change is considered an important aspect for successful development in the modern era. Given that it is not easy for organizations to implement change, it is logical that several respondents indicated that they disagreed or rather disagreed with the statement that it is easy to change their job description as needed. This is the statement that received the second-highest number of negative responses. There are three statements that received the same number of negative responses. Namely, four respondents indicated that they disagree or rather disagree that managers at their workplaces monitor the process without excessive supervision; everyone has the opportunity to suggest changes, and their performance is clearly recorded.

Table 4. Summary of survey results (source: survey)

Claims	Rather disagree and agree	I rather agree and agree
I often perform tasks that are not related to my direct job responsibilities.	12	14
Doing inappropriate tasks causes me additional stress.	15	11
Performing inappropriate tasks reduces my job satisfaction.	14	12
I feel valued at my workplace.	3	23
I regularly receive positive feedback from my colleagues about my work.	4	22
I regularly give positive feedback to my colleagues.	5	21
I feel empowered to do my job in a way that I see fit.	3	23
I feel motivated in my work.	4	22
I am loyal to my workplace.	0	26
I am able to respond quickly to ongoing changes.	1	25
I have convenient collaboration tools with my team.	3	23

Overall, respondents have a positive view of the governance of their organization. The main benefits of Holacracy could be directly related to the ability to facilitate the implementation of change and the modification of job descriptions. The survey asked a second series of statements based on scientific articles (see Table 4).

Although scientific articles contain information that performing inappropriate tasks creates additional stress and reduces job satisfaction (Elfering et al., 2023), the survey results show that less than half of the respondents agree or tend to agree with this statement (Weirauch et al., 2023). However, slightly more than half of the respondents agree or tend to agree that they often perform tasks that are not related to their direct job duties. In order to draw more correct conclusions about the answers provided, it would be necessary to analyze in more detail whether those who perform tasks that are not related to their direct job duties have responded that performing inappropriate tasks causes stress and reduces job satisfaction.

The majority of respondents feel valued, motivated, committed to their workplace, receive regular positive feedback, and feel empowered to do their job the way they see fit. This indicates that many organizations already have working conditions that are practiced in self-organized teams.

It should be noted that although 10 respondents disagreed or somewhat disagreed with the statement that it is easy to introduce changes in their workplaces, 25 responded that they are able to respond quickly to ongoing changes.

Overall, the results do not indicate any clear trends that would show a need for urgent improvements. Rather, the survey results indicate that a culture that is conducive to the implementation of Holacracy already exists in NGOs.

This survey was conducted to observe the general trend among non-governmental organizations. To more accurately assess the state of a particular organization, it is necessary to conduct a survey of all employees and summarize the results.

At the end of the questionnaire, respondents were asked whether they had heard of the principles of Holacracy, 85.7% of respondents answered this question negatively. This indicates that more resources and time need to be invested in researching and promoting this topic to draw more qualitative conclusions about the impact of Holacracy.

5. Conclusions

The paper examined the Holacracy framework by providing additional benefits for Holacracy users in NGOs, and conducted research on the Holacracy need and implementation challenges. The aim of the study was to determine the suitability of the Holacracy approach for NGOs. The authors of the paper have made the following conclusions about the research.

There is a gap in literature for Holacracy implementation in NGOs. Holacracy is a form of management without managers, but it is necessary to select a person who will be responsible for implementing the developed plan. Roles can also be assigned when implementing changes - who will be responsible for reminding about the set goals, who will conduct employee evaluation surveys, who will be responsible for adhering to the established structure. For organizations like NGO, whose revenue depends on project funding, it is important to be able to adapt to different scenarios, show initiative, and find solutions in non-standard situations. Holacracy is a rather novel management model without strict hierarchy, employees are encouraged to make their own decisions and take responsibility for their choices. This approach promotes active employee engagement and increased motivation. The paper results confirm the statement that Holacracy is a suitable and modern form of governance for non-governmental organizations.

This statement is agreed by all three interviewed experts, as well as the findings of the literature analysis. From the results of the quantitative questionnaire, it is possible to conclude that a culture that is consistent with the philosophy of Holacracy already exists in several non-governmental organizations. Consequently, the process of implementing Holacracy could be much easier than in commercial organizations. One of the defining principles of Holacracy is a specific meeting format that is followed at each meeting. As one of the research contributions, it could be concluded, that the Holacracy meeting format ensures structured and productive discussions, as a benefit, that allows for a quick and efficient review of the work done. If the company currently does not have a specific meeting format, the introduction of Holacracy can make a considerable and positive contribution to more efficient monitoring of meeting progress, as well as saving time.

Holacracy can be considered a management innovation because it is the first management model that provides for fully decentralized authority in an organization. Although literature sources and experts indicate that self-organized teams have great potential in today's rapid pace of change, the results of a quantitative survey show that a large part of respondents has not yet heard of the Holacracy model.

The results of the research also confirm the statements about the need for change in culture to overcome the risks; the successful implementation of Holacracy requires a change in the mindset of managers and employees. Experts have repeatedly emphasized that Holacracy is not implemented by changing the structure alone - it takes more time for managers to be able to trust their colleagues. Holacracy is based on the ability to trust that each employee is capable and responsible enough to perform the roles assigned to them. The main benefits of Holacracy are increased employee motivation and engagement. The Holacracy model is not chosen primarily to improve financial performance, but these performance

indicators can also improve with the ability of employees to show initiative and take responsibility.

Based on the conclusions drawn, the authors of the paper make the following recommendations for non-governmental organizations that plan to implement the Holacracy model. Before implementing Holacracy, it is necessary to assess the readiness of employees and managers to lead themselves, for example, to use a questionnaire from this paper. Despite the fact that Holacracy has several benefits, this approach will not be suitable for organizations where employees are not ready to take responsibility, make decisions and implement their responsibilities on their own initiative. The biggest investment in implementing Holacracy will be time, which is related to change management and mindset change.

As one of the key limitations of research population and industry specifics - it is suggested to perform a more in-depth study of the suitability of non-governmental organizations for implementing Holacracy that would require surveying a larger number of organizations and calculating the correlation coefficient.

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