

# Dynamic Governance

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## Overview

**Dynamic Governance**, also known as **Sociocracy**, is a form of self-governance of the people, by the people, and for the people. It is a dynamic system of self-governance using consent-based decision-making among equal individuals based on a well-conceived **organizational structure, operating system, and decision-making process** that is clear, efficient, transparent, [egalitarian](#), inclusive, collaborative, responsive, [scalable](#), and doable.

The word “sociocracy” is derived from the Latin and Greek words socios (companion) and kratein (to govern). Sociocracy means rule by the “socios”, people who have a social relationship with one another, (whereas democracy is rule by the “demos”, the general mass of people). Socio-crazy is thus Governance by the People who Know and Associate with One Another.

Dynamic Governance/Sociocracy is also scalable. It allows all perspectives to be included in policy decisions at all levels.

## **The Organizational Structure**

1. Everything that needs care in an organization is divided into domains. Each domain is taken care of by a group of people called a '**circle**', which has all the authority and responsibility in their domain. There are general circles that address general purposes and tasks, and more specific circles that address more specific purposes and tasks.

See [Circles in sociocracy: an effective organizational structure \(sociocracyforall.org\)](https://www.sociocracyforall.org/circles-in-sociocracy-an-effective-organizational-structure)

2. **Purpose/Mission/Aim.** Each circle has a purpose, mission, and/or aim that orients and aligns the circle. All discussions, activities, and decisions are to serve the purpose, mission, and/or aim.

3. **Roles:** <https://www.sociocracyforall.org/process-roles/>

Roles live in a circle.

### **Leader**

- Is the convenor of a circle.
- Oversees the operations of a circle.
- Keeps the group on task in accomplishing its aim.
- The Leader represents the circle to more specific circles through "[double-linking](#)". Is considered the "top-down link", from general to specific circles.

### **Facilitator**

- Conducts the meetings.
- Ensures all members are heard.
- Makes sure the circle is clear, on purpose, productive, and inclusive.

### **Scribe**

- Maintains and ensures access to accurate records of the circle.
- Participates in establishing the agenda.
- Helps ensure that all stays on task.
- Ensures projects are addressed/evaluated and new persons for roles are selected.

The leader, facilitator, and scribe create the **Agenda** for the meetings.

### **Delegate**

- The Delegate is chosen to represent the circle to more general circles through "[double-linking](#)". Is considered the "bottom-up link", from specific to general circles. Carries the voice of the circle to a parent circle, and from there, to the entire organization.

In effect, both the Leader and the Delegate communicate with other circles to make sure all the related groups are in the loop, connected, informed, and coordinated, thereby connecting/linking circles from specific to more general (wider context) circles and visa versa.

**Operational roles** with specific tasks could be established as needed and desired.

**A General Circle**, a “management team” focused on the aims, is made up of Leaders and Delegates from more specific circles to ensure all circles are aligned and connected, support circles in doing their work, and ensure all the parts fit together and are coordinated.

Instead of generalizing decisions in the general circle, decisions are passed onto or assigned to specific circles, resulting in semi-autonomous circles empowered to carry out their aim and make decisions needed along the way.

This way, we know exactly which circle is responsible for what decisions, there is a way of connecting them so that work is coordinated, and we know exactly how each piece of the whole relates to one another.

**A Mission Circle** can look ahead and help circles stay connected to the overall mission of an organization. Through [double-linking](#), the Delegate of the General Circle reports to the Mission Circle (bottom-up), and visa versa; the Leader of the Mission Circle reports to the General Circle (top-down) - for alignment and flow of information between circles, mindful of the overall mission that guides the everyday work.

Mission Circles could be made up of members/stakeholders within as well as outside the organization.

Circles and Roles are flexible, depending on the needs and desires of an organization. One person could even have several roles.

Instead of one central source of power, there is distributed authority. We know who decides what, there is transparency, and there is a good flow of information - so all the circles, efforts, and actions are aligned and create synergy.

4. A sociocratic organization is based on leadership and representation from general to more specific circles, and from specific to more general circles.

In effect, there is a “[circular hierarchy](#)” where there is a bottom-up and top-down relationship based on stratification of specificity, enabling information to flow freely through the organization. In a circular hierarchy, authority and decision-making power are distributed among different circles or teams within an organization. Each circle is responsible for a specific area or function and has the autonomy to make decisions related to its domain.

This bottom-up/top-down “circular hierarchy” relationship is accomplished through “[double-linking](#)” in which circles are connected by at least two people serving in the roles of Leader and Delegate. A link is created in *both* directions, bottom-up and top-down, creating a flow of information in all directions to ensure everyone and everything works well together, to provide transparency, and to ensure no abuse of power.

The decision-making method of sociocracy is [consent](#) on all levels - based on reasoning together “in the round”. This means that there cannot be over-powering of a super-circle over a sub-circle since the lower circle has two members (Leader and Delegate) that are also members of the higher circle, each making their decisions by consent. Any one member may object to any proposal, based on a concern of unintended consequences, for the purpose of developing a better proposal. This results in inclusivity as well as efficiency, and solves the problem of any undue authority and “voting”, which creates “winners” and “losers”.

5. Sociocracy as an organizational structure can potentially scale up to any size, including large organizations as well as the whole nation. It allows all perspectives to be included in policy decisions at all levels. See <https://www.sociocracyforall.org/sociocracy-for-a-country/>

With the [double-linking](#) of specific and general circles, Sociocracy can work well for large groups made up of committed and involved members engaged with the purpose and mission.

Staff can be organized sociocratically in an organization, town, and even a country, and can be run sociocratically by “nesting” and “linking” several layers up to a national level.

To encourage a culture of:

- self-management on all levels,
  - more authority overall at local levels, and
  - proactive involvement of community members, especially on matters that affect them,
- there could be greater self-organizing by bioregion and more strengthening of structures at local levels.

Noteworthy is the **Jeffersonian Ward Republic**, a concept promoted by Thomas Jefferson to place most of the functions of governance in the ward, a small subdivision of a county or municipality. *"The article nearest my heart is the division of counties into wards"*, wrote Jefferson in 1816. His proposal was that such wards consist of no more people than can all know one another and personally perform the functions of government to and for one another.

In this sense, self-organized work circles could be established and bridged from the level of the community, to the town/city, to the nation-state, to the bioregion, to the nation.

In his book [\*Collective Power: Patterns for a Self-Organized Future\*](#), Ted J. Rau addresses how we can design a structure and decision-making process for "larger scale units of self-organization", scaling up the functions of an all-member meeting from a community of maybe 100 people into a town or a bioregion - worth reviewing.

## 6. How to facilitate the connection between citizens and formal government

In general, the formal government would remain in power, balancing centralization and decentralization, and increase the information flow both ways, from government to citizens and vice versa, with different forms and means of facilitation and participation.

Different approaches could include ways for more citizen participation in municipal government, large-scale feedback via mapping of perspectives, and sortition-based bodies to help ensure that diverse perspectives and experiences are considered in the decision-making process, leading to more inclusive and equitable outcomes.

In his book [\*Collective Power: Patterns for a Self-Organized Future\*](#), Ted J. Rau sites as an example a policy-making process in Taiwan's vTaiwan platform based on the following steps:

- "Identification: A specific issue is identified and presented to the public for discussion and feedback.
- Public deliberation: Citizens are invited to participate in online forums to express their opinions, discuss the issue, and propose solutions. The algorithm helps to identify patterns without drowning out minority opinions, while minimizing 'nonsense' opinions or unfounded, extreme positions. The algorithms are also set up in a way that rewards convergence. It results in a cluster of opinions that can inform policy – a systemic constellation of needs and opinions.
- Collaborative drafting: A collaborative drafting process occurs when stakeholders and experts collaborate to create a proposed policy or regulation.
- Expert consultation: Experts are invited to provide feedback and recommendations on the proposed policy or regulation.
- Public review: The proposed policy or regulation is available for public review and feedback.
- Revision and finalization: The policy or regulation is revised based on the feedback received during the public review period and finalized.

Throughout the entire process, there is a strong emphasis on transparency."

Among other examples, “the Iroquois Confederation... a sophisticated system of governance emphasizing consensus-building and collective decision-making to promote the common good, remains an inspiration for modern deliberative democracy, in which citizens engage in respectful and informed dialogue to reach common solutions to public problems.”

Again, in his book, Rau addresses how we can design a structure and decision-making process for “larger scale units of self-organization”, scaling up the functions of an all-member meeting from a community of maybe 100 people into a town or a bioregion - worth reviewing.

## **The Operating System**

Sociocracy is a dynamic form of governance or management that presumes **equality** of individuals and is based on [consent](#). This equality is not expressed with “one person, one vote” law of democracy, but rather by **a group of individuals (the circle) reasoning together** until a decision is reached that is satisfactory to each circle member.

The [circle structure](#) allows working groups to operate and make decisions in **small groups** which makes it easier to hear one another and allows communication to flow reliably and transparently.

To ensure everyone is heard and takes time to listen, we share **in rounds**: one person speaks at a time, one by one, ensuring all are heard; a practice of inclusion. Since one knows one will get one’s turn, one can more readily listen to everyone else.

In essence, each circle is fully autonomous whereby all decisions go through the healthy judgment of committed circle members reasoning together.

Circle members therefore need to know the full sentiments of a community/town by open forums, public hearings, surveys, and/or polling (via [ranked choice voting](#) or [penny polls](#)) to make well-informed decisions that represent the people of a community/town. This can also provide a way to involve the community!

All information, which would be a matter of public record, c/would be evaluated at the different levels of circles/organizations through [double-linking](#), with Delegates (bottom-up link) and Leaders (top-down link). Deciding and implementing would be through the consent of circle/organization members. This could facilitate a culture of both representation of, by, and for We, the People, as well as the autonomy of the circle/organization.

Note that it is likely that, instead of a forum for voting on matters, which may result in division, particularly on matters that are controversial, town meetings may gradually become an opportunity to:

- learn about and weigh in on issues through open forums, public hearings, surveys, and polling
- review and celebrate the work accomplished by circles/organizations throughout the year
- consider/propose new projects
- develop and become involved with committees

## **Meeting Format**

The **meeting format** could include, **in rounds**, a **check-in** at the beginning of meetings for context, and a **meeting evaluation** at the end of meetings so as to improve subsequent meetings.

Facilitated by the facilitator, the Agenda is consented to by all circle members.

Open and transparent communication, dialogue, listening, and feedback is the new culture in Sociocracy, fostering mutual connection and understanding among members, and providing the information needed for making new, positive, and better proposals, policies, and plans.

All is in service of the shared aim and seeking win-win solutions.

## The Decision-making Process

In a well-facilitated circle of people, Sociocracy is based on the ability to communicate using reasoning and rational arguments, build individual and organizational capacities, and make decisions that serve a purpose, mission, and/or aim.

All decisions about how to accomplish the purpose, mission, and/or aim are a result of hearing from each person **in rounds** resulting in a policy or proposal to which each person can consent.

After a policy or proposal is well-understood and ready for a decision, each person in the circle decides by active consent.

**Consent** means one can work with the proposal and is willing to move forward, either because it is one's preference or something one can work with; "it is good enough for now, safe enough to try"; there are no "paramount objections".

Note that consent is different from "consensus", which is based on full "agreement". Also, blocking, for example, "I don't like it", is not good enough.

Consent-based decision-making is also different from voting, which can short-cut collective sense-making and result in majority rule that can disenfranchise the voting minority.

Everyone agrees to a culture of reasoning together and using rational arguments that appeal to the sensibility of circle members. All circle members are heard "in the round", objections are welcome to account for unintended consequences and to develop better proposals, and needs are met sufficiently in proposals - all in support of the collective's good and the wellbeing of the whole.

Decisions are made when there are no remaining "paramount objections", that is, when there is informed consent from all participants.

An essential element of Sociocracy is providing opportunities for an organization to continually improve. As such, every consented to decision, policy, project, and person for a role include **agreed upon criteria by which they are evaluated at a predetermined time**.



**An objection** (no consent) is often considered a prompt to improve the proposal. It points to something in the proposal that isn't good enough yet, for example when a new policy would have unintended or negative consequences (including somewhere else) that need to be addressed somehow. It also may be something that is outside one's preference, or range of tolerance, and considered a "deal breaker".

Instead of arguing, members focus on the purpose, mission, and aim of the group, and dialogue to find more options, common ground, and the best solution that aligns members with the purpose, mission, and aim and the goals of the circle/organization. This fosters well-reasoned arguments that appeal to the sensibility of the group, the ability of the objector to work productively toward the goals of the circle/organization, and the development of a proposal based on strengthening the evaluation criteria and perhaps shortening the evaluation time-frame.

This might also prevent problems that could surface over time using less inclusive, less integrative decision-making processes.

**Consent** can thereby contain a range of preferences and tolerances.

**Objections** are based on what one cannot work with based on a concern that the circle cannot achieve its aim.

**Consent involves, in a round:**

- Understanding the proposal
- Exploring ideas, leading to a development of its dimensions (picture forming) and proposal shaping (proposal ideas)
- Followed by a clarifying questions round, followed by a quick reaction round
- A consent round (Asking: "Do you consent?")
- If there are objections, seek understanding (is it an objection or a preference?; is there concern that a proposal interferes with the overall aim?), and, if needed, amend the proposal (measure the concern [its severity, importance, potential impact], revise the content, strengthen/revise the evaluation criteria, and/or shorten the evaluation term)

**A decision is made** when there is no unresolved objection and/or objections have been integrated into a proposal. While all preferences may not be met, all objections need to be addressed.

**Consent** - "it is good enough for now, safe enough to try; there are no 'paramount objections'. It can include a method of evaluation at a predetermined time.

See [Dynamic Governance Graph](#)

## **Selection Process**

### Terms

“Select” is based on a consent-based decision-making process.

“Elect” is based on a vote-based decision-making process in which the majority rules.

We even choose by consent each circle’s roles (leaders, facilitators, scribes, and delegates). Through sharing in rounds, the roles are filled by selecting the best person for each role, with a term and method of evaluation. Only when there is no objection may the person fill the role. If one desires to fill a role, listening and collaboration is the new culture, (vs. polarizing or authoritative behavior).

The process involves:

- Knowing the role description, including the authority and tasks
- Creating a list of qualifications, in the round
- Consideration of who can fill the role, resulting in a list of nominations based on qualifications, in the round
- Sharing in the round reasons for a nomination so members could learn of each other’s thinking
- Doing another round of nominations based on the new information and any new opinions
- Again, sharing in the round reasons for a nomination, existing or new, so members could learn of each other’s thinking.

What is important is the sharing of the reasons based on qualifications.

- Based on what is heard, the facilitator makes a proposal of a candidate for a role.
- There will be a consent round for that proposal.
- Note that the candidate proposed speaks last.
- Objections are raised when one is concerned about a person in a role and achieving the circle’s aim.

This process can be used for other decisions as well, for example, the criteria upon which the nominee is evaluated at a predetermined time, or is subject to a certain term.

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## **Consent provides a way to make a decision without voting.**

For a governance organization to succeed, we need to model active (vs. passive) consent.

*"Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their **just** powers from the **consent** of the governed..."* - The U.S. Declaration of Independence, penned by Thomas Jefferson in 1776 <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>

With Dynamic Governance/Sociocracy, **listening, collaboration, and consent-based decision-making** become the new culture.

In contrast, here is how we don't make decisions: we don't monopolize a conversation, we don't control people, we don't impose our views without a discussion, and we don't vote, which can result in majority rule and disenfranchise up to 49% of voting members.

**Below are resources comparing Sociocracy with other forms of governance.**

### **Summary**

"Sociocracy is a governance method based on collaboration, self-organization, and distributed authority. It is designed for transparency, inclusiveness, and accountability. Democracy values freedom and equality but doesn't have a governance structure guaranteed to ensure them. A Sociocratic Democracy uses the methods of sociocracy to achieve the values of democracy creating a practical and effective way to organize...and help democracy achieve its highest goal: freedom and equality for all, finally." [www.sociocracy.info](http://www.sociocracy.info)

As a powerful consent-based decision-making process and governance system, Dynamic Governance/Sociocracy also holds the promise of creating "Common Good Communities" and [Jeffersonian Ward Republics](#) made up of diverse people and a broad spectrum of ideas about what constitutes the Common Good. It is a way to conduct meetings, make decisions, and is an organizational structure and operating system that can scale up to any size, including the whole nation. Learning Sociocracy requires training and experience.

## **Resources**

### **Links**

[www.sociocracy.info](http://www.sociocracy.info)

<https://www.sociocracyforall.org>

<https://www.sociocracy.info/what-is-sociocracy/>

<https://www.sociocracyforall.org/sociocracy/>

<https://www.sociocracyforall.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Sociocracy-summary-booklet1.pdf>

The video at <https://www.sociocracyforall.org/content/> explains in 20 minutes how "consent-based self-governance; dynamic governance" can work.

[Sociocratic Democracy \(sociocracy.info\) https://www.sociocracy.info/sociocratic-democracy-faq/](https://www.sociocracy.info/sociocratic-democracy-faq/)

<https://www.sociocracyforall.org/events/>

<https://www.sociocracyforall.org/sociocracy-for-a-country/>

<http://sociocracyconsulting.com>

<http://www.governancealive.com>

<https://communitydevelopment.ces.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/What-is-Dynamic-Governance.pdf>

Dynamic Governance Overview

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1EuxZeAkCD7961OX6fPrDcVjpCuClcc4w\\_1MlzaYygH0/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1EuxZeAkCD7961OX6fPrDcVjpCuClcc4w_1MlzaYygH0/edit)

Dynamic Governance Graph

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1o5f3p1ZJ5LT8bthA1LO4x0wUTQ9LV2x83oshqGQTx8A/edit>

Self-governance [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1uWzX2GRevIPXxmNPVF00ExT3za1NMUff\\_218j4Ho4QI/](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1uWzX2GRevIPXxmNPVF00ExT3za1NMUff_218j4Ho4QI/)

[Case studies of sociocracy - Sociocracy For All](#)

### **Books**

[We The People. Consenting to a Deeper Democracy. A Guide to Sociocratic Principles and Methods.](#)

[How to Apply the Principles of Self-Governance to Our Workplaces, Governments, and Organizations](#), by

John Buck and Sharon Villines

[Many Voices One Song, Shared Power With Sociocracy](#), by Ted J. Rau and Jerry Koch-Gonzalez

[Collective Power by Ted Rau - Sociocracy For All](#)

### **Inspirational quotes**

*"The equal rights of man, and the happiness of every individual, are now acknowledged to be the only legitimate objects of government."* — Thomas Jefferson, Letters of Thomas Jefferson

*"Is a democracy, such as we know it, the last improvement possible in government? Is it not possible to take a step further towards recognizing and organizing the rights of man?"*

*"To be strictly just, [a government] must have the sanction and consent of the governed."*

*"Can there not be a government in which majorities do not virtually decide right and wrong, but conscience?"*

- Henry David Thoreau

*"Justice in the life and conduct of the State is possible only as first it resides in the hearts and souls of the citizens."* - Plato

*"You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete."* - R. Buckminster Fuller

*"Small islands of coherence in a sea of chaos have the capacity to shift the system to a higher order."* - Nobel Laureate Ilya Prigogine

everything is in service



to everything else

## **How does Sociocracy/Dynamic Governance compare with other forms of governance?**

### **Some resources:**

<https://www.sociocracyforall.org/decision-making-methods-comparison/>

For a comparative diagram, go here:

<https://www.sociocracyforall.org/comparison-of-decision-making-methods/>

<https://socialcompare.com/en/comparison/decision-making-tools>

<https://www.sociocracyforall.org/comparing-roberts-rules-and-sociocracy/> - an excellent article comparing Sociocracy to Robert's Rules

<https://communitydevelopment.ces.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/What-is-Dynamic-Governance.pdf?fwd=no> (which makes mention of Roberts' Rules of Order)

[http://www.livepeaceintobeing.org/SIA\\_101\\_w\\_Speaker\\_Notes\\_13Mar13.pdf](http://www.livepeaceintobeing.org/SIA_101_w_Speaker_Notes_13Mar13.pdf) - a thorough presentation of Sociocracy. Slide 4 addresses:

- Democracy based on majority rule is not working.
- Parliamentary procedure can be manipulated by a majority who want to influence a decision unfairly.
- Rule of the many by the few is not working and the many are becoming more vocal and angry about it, like perhaps "Occupy Wall Street."
- People are not feeling enfranchised and display apathy on voting day.
- Today's workers do not have a high level of commitment to their organizations.
- People are not empowered in hierarchies.
- Policy and communication flows mainly downward.
- When inclusiveness is a goal, how can the needs of the individual be ignored?
- **Sociocracy allows all perspectives to be included in policy decisions at all levels.** - An interesting and compelling conclusion.

### **Voting**

Regarding voting, in his book [\*Collective Power: Patterns for a Self-Organized Future\*](#), Ted J. Rau states:

"A majority vote doesn't reward thinking for the collective's good. It short-cuts collective sense-making. Instead of an organic system of nested entities, each with its collective-level processes, the system goes from individual voters directly to 'the national government' without enough intermediaries. It's like a tree made decisions on the tree level by having each cell vote individually, disregarding what's suitable for the different systems, bark, and branches.

In first-past-the-pole majority voting with a *the winner takes it all approach*, the minority is overpowered by the majority – *power-over*. In a decision-making method based on alignment with the collective purpose, like consent, people might still not get their preference. But if needs are met sufficiently, and the collective level is worth supporting, they may be more likely to *choose* based on the wellbeing of the whole. It would optimize for a *choice* in favor of the benefit of the group, not a forced imposition by the majority of competing individuals. This shift from *power-over* to *power-with* creates an environment where individual and collective interests are integrated instead of being played against each other – but it requires so much more than just a decision-making method. It requires *power-with* and *power-within* on all levels.”

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**Note:** Sociocracy is not socialism. Do not confuse the terms! Socialism is an economic theory in which all means of production, distribution, and exchange are owned or managed in common. While the ideal of socialism, “to each according to one’s need, from each according to one’s ability”, may be worthwhile, it has become distorted when an oligarchy is in charge. Sociocracy on the other hand is a system of organization and governance with the people in charge; a governance system of, by, and for the people!, and can be applied in any kind of economic system.

For the **origins of Sociocracy**, see <https://www.sociocracy.info/origins-of-sociocracy/> and <https://www.sociocracy.info/first-implementation-of-sociocracy/>

## **Tools for Working Together**

**Bohm Dialogue** is a freely flowing group conversation in which participants attempt to reach a common understanding, experiencing everyone’s point of view fully, equally, and nonjudgmentally.

*“If we are to live in harmony with ourselves and with nature, we need to be able to communicate freely in a creative movement in which no one permanently holds to or otherwise defends his own ideas.”*

<https://www.brainpickings.org/2016/12/05/david-bohm-on-dialogue/>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bohm\\_Dialogue](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bohm_Dialogue) <https://www.bohmdialogue.org/>

**Collective Presencing** is a collective practice with the purpose of acting in more life-affirming ways, using the collective wisdom of the people gathered. It is collective sense-making and meaning-making, integrating our diverse ways of knowing. Based on deep circle practice, it weaves authentic, individual contributions into new synergy, needed for the complex issues we need to deal with in our world. It is a process that addresses the question: What becomes possible when we are truly present, together?

<https://www.collectivepresencing.org>

*“Whenever you interact with people, don’t be there primarily as a function or a role, but as the field of conscious Presence.”* — Eckhart Tolle

**Non-Violent Communication** - Nonviolent Communication is based on the principle of ahimsa – the natural state of compassion when no violence is present in the heart. ~ Marshall Rosenberg

Nonviolent Communication (NVC) is a consciousness that manifests as a way of being in the world. The purpose of Nonviolent Communication is to serve life and to create the quality of connection in which everyone’s needs can be met through compassionate listening, responsible communication, and giving.

<https://www.nonviolentcommunication.com/>

<https://www.nonviolentcommunication.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/What-is-NVC-Information.pdf>

A 4-Part Nonviolent Communication Process: [4-Part Nonviolent Communication \(NVC\)](#)