Selforganisation

What is it and how to benefit from this concept to the full advantage?

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What is selforganisation?

Selforganisation is a terrific and powerful concept to create a faster, more effective and decisive organisation while working with highly motivated people. The basic idea is to delegate decision power from the manager to the team. By doing so decisions can be made faster, since the teams don't have to wait for the manager to decide; teams will be more motivated since this gives them the opportunity to establish more self-control; and management power becomes available. The latter you could direct to cost-savings or enhance the strategic execution power of the organisation.

Selforganisation is not only about delegation of decision power. It is an answer in search for a more effective organisation, being able to respond swiftly to changes in the environment. In order to do so you will not only need teams that are able to make more decisions on their own, you will also need teams that are critical to the way they work and detect and implement improvements as they go within full responsibility and aware of what it takes to be successful.

Benefits and risks

This whole concept may seem easy, but is not an easy thing to accomplish. People, teams and organisations are used to a different way of working. Implementing selforganisation is shifting the management paradigm. This is a journey, not a single step to take.

There are a lot of ways this can go wrong. The journey is about finding a new balance between management and teams. By implementing selforganisation managers could delegate too much, shifting more to laissez-faire and by consequence not gaining the advantages of the concept. The other way around, delegating too little, not taking the teams seriously, will not work either. Or teams could get stuck in endless meetings; finding a new power balance; having difficulties in cooperation within and outside the teams; etc.

Framework and principles

The gain the full advantage of the concept and not to step into the various pitfalls it is vital to find guidance using a set of principles and external coaching. The set of proven principles will make it possible to share learnings across the teams and to facilitate cross-team cooperation since the teams speak the same language. This set of principles must leave room for the organisation to experiment and create their own way of working, but must also contain enough guidance to facilitate cross team connection and learning.

Below are the principles we find useful and work with.

1. Have a vision

Teams must have a vision. This gives them direction and helps them with the Why. A vision consists of a thorough understanding of (1) the internal strengths and weaknesses of the current situation; (2) the external threats and opportunities; (3) the goals: both operational as well as change; (4)and a view on how to get there.

2. Work in a fixed rhythm

Teams must learn and become a better team by doing. The best way to do so is the create a fixed rhythm. Steps of one month e.g. will do. Start the step by creating the plan for the upcoming month with the team. Hold weekly meetings and measure progress. Finish the step by discussing the results of the month and sharing the learned lessons.

3. Work on basis of intrinsic motivation

People are intrinsically motivated for their job. Sometimes however, there are blocking factors. These blocking factors should be detected and eliminated. Teams detect these blocking factors and, in most cases, the manager will have to help them to resolve these factors.

Teams should be between 4 to 8 persons. Too small teams will have too little benefit from each other. Too large teams will have the risk ending up in endless meetings and have the risk of not everybody really participating.

4. Measure performance transparently

Teams like to achieve results. Compare this to a basketball game with and without a scoreboard. Without is far less fun. Showing results is important to drive team results. This board should be transparent, i.e. for everyone to see, and should be invented by the team itself. Primary it must be a scoreboard for the team itself, secondary it can help reporting to others.

5. See the whole picture

A team is mostly not a team of its own. Teams will have to work together to achieve results for the customer. It is important that every team in the chain, starting with the trigger and ending with the product or service, knows its role
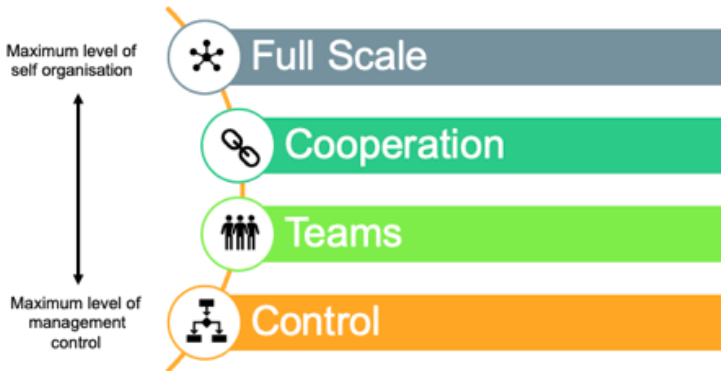
and sees the whole picture. Possibly also adding some combined planning and monitoring at that level.

6. Anchor the change

Teams learn along the way. Learning consists of being aware of the possibility of an improvement and finding a way to design and implement that improvement. The main thing is that it is far more easy to do what we did yesterday. It takes less energy. Teams will have to agree to a way to anchor the changes made.

Stages

As mentioned implementing selforganisation is a journey. This journey starts at the bottom level of the pyramid below and could go all the way up to the top level. Neither position is wrong or right. It is just a matter of discovering what level of selforganisation fits with your company.

A company consists of teams. Teams work together in value chains, delivering value (products or services) to its customers. Teams and value chains can have different maturity levels within one organisation. This depends on various circumstances like complexity, team size, education level, history, etc. An organisation as a whole will have a certain place in this model depending on the strategy it chooses.

Level 1 'Control'

Level 1 'Control' is for most companies the starting level. The focus is on control. Management is present and is used making the decisions. Teams are not entrepreneurial and are not meant to be entrepreneurial. People and their work is controlled by management. At the deepest level people are used to take instructions on what to do. If the instructions are not present they 'panic'.

Level 2 'Teams'

Level 2 'Teams' is the team level. With the focus on selforganisation teams are starting to get an entrepreneurial attitude and start making decisions on their own. Within boundaries of course. Management is still present, but takes some distance. They set the boundaries, define the assignment and results, wherein the teams are responsible for the how. While doing so they start developing themselves.

Team members start speaking up to each other, start detecting impediments and start taking ownership. At the end of level 2 all principles as mentioned above are fully implemented and working.

Level 3 'Cooperation'

Teams are hardly ever on their own. Teams work to create results for customers in value chains: processes that start with a trigger and end with the delivery of a product or service to the customer. Each step in between, adds value to the product being delivered.

In level 3 teams know how to cooperate with the other teams requiring a minimum of effort. All principles as mentioned above are fully implemented and working on the value chain level.

Level 4 'Full scale'

The levels are building up to full autonomy. At the top of level 4 there is no middle management anymore. All tasks are fully delegated to the teams, i.e: HR, information, organisation, finance and control. There is a light control structure supporting the teams on the subjects mentioned since the teams carry out the HR tasks but cannot be HR specialists.

Questions? Let's talk

Please contact us. Contact details are at the bottom of this page.
And, yes, we have a proven framework to accompany these principles. And we do think the framework is important, but we value the above set of principles more. For further reading we would like to refer to our website: www.ribbonwoodconsultancy.com.

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