



HOLACRACY

KICKSTART GUIDE:

A ROADMAP FOR ADOPTION & INITIAL STRUCTURING

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HOLACRACYROADMAP

Here's (roughly)
how it works...

Download the
**Getting Started
Guide**

Note: This guide only covers
the initial structuring process.

Get an
Experience

You are here.

Exploring
Holacracy

Capturing
Initial Structure

Signing
the Holacracy Constitution

Starting
the practice

Stabilizing
the practice

Every organization is unique.
Schedule a free consultation
with a licensed coach to discuss
your needs.

*These steps will vary
for each organization!*

All HR processes
captured in
governance

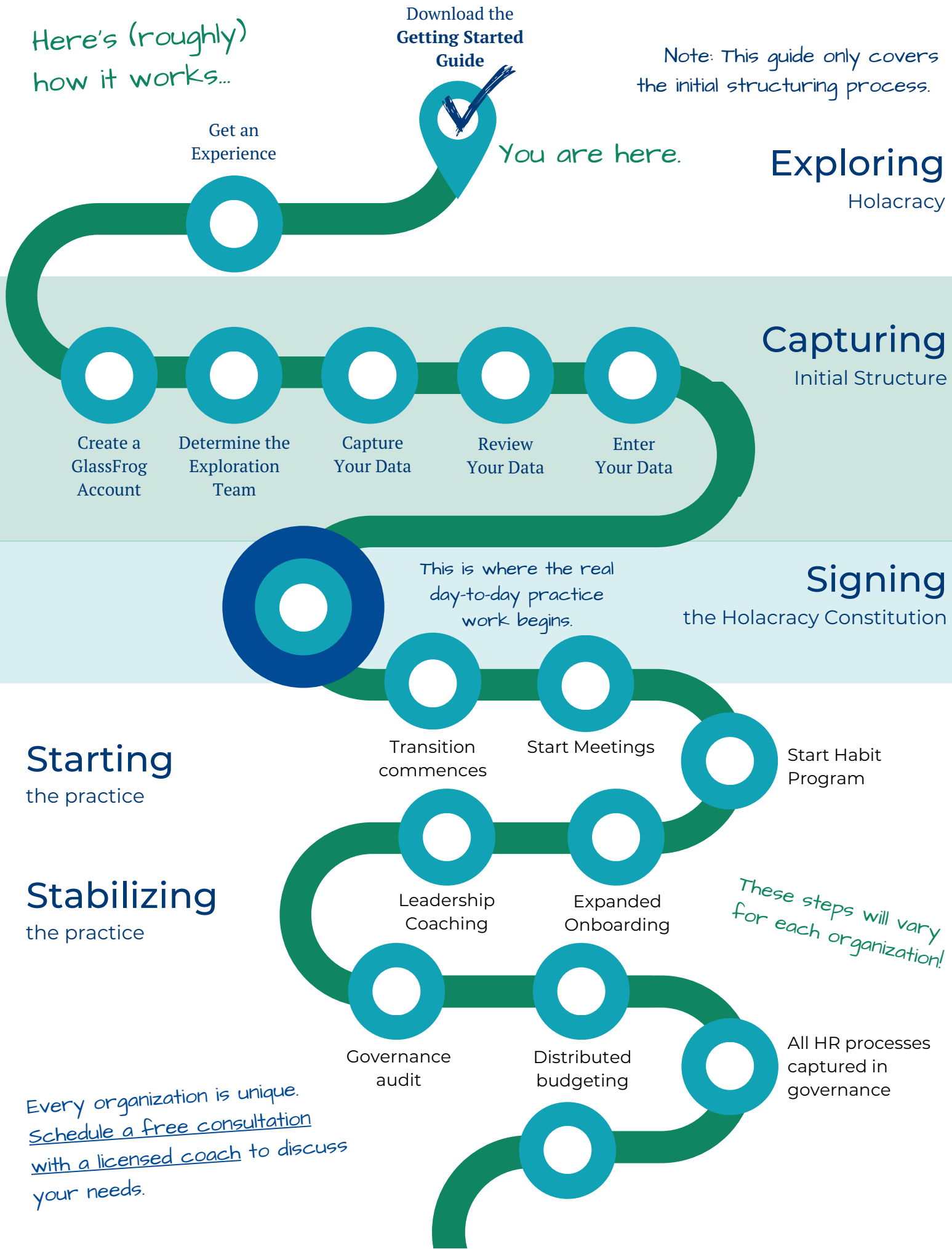
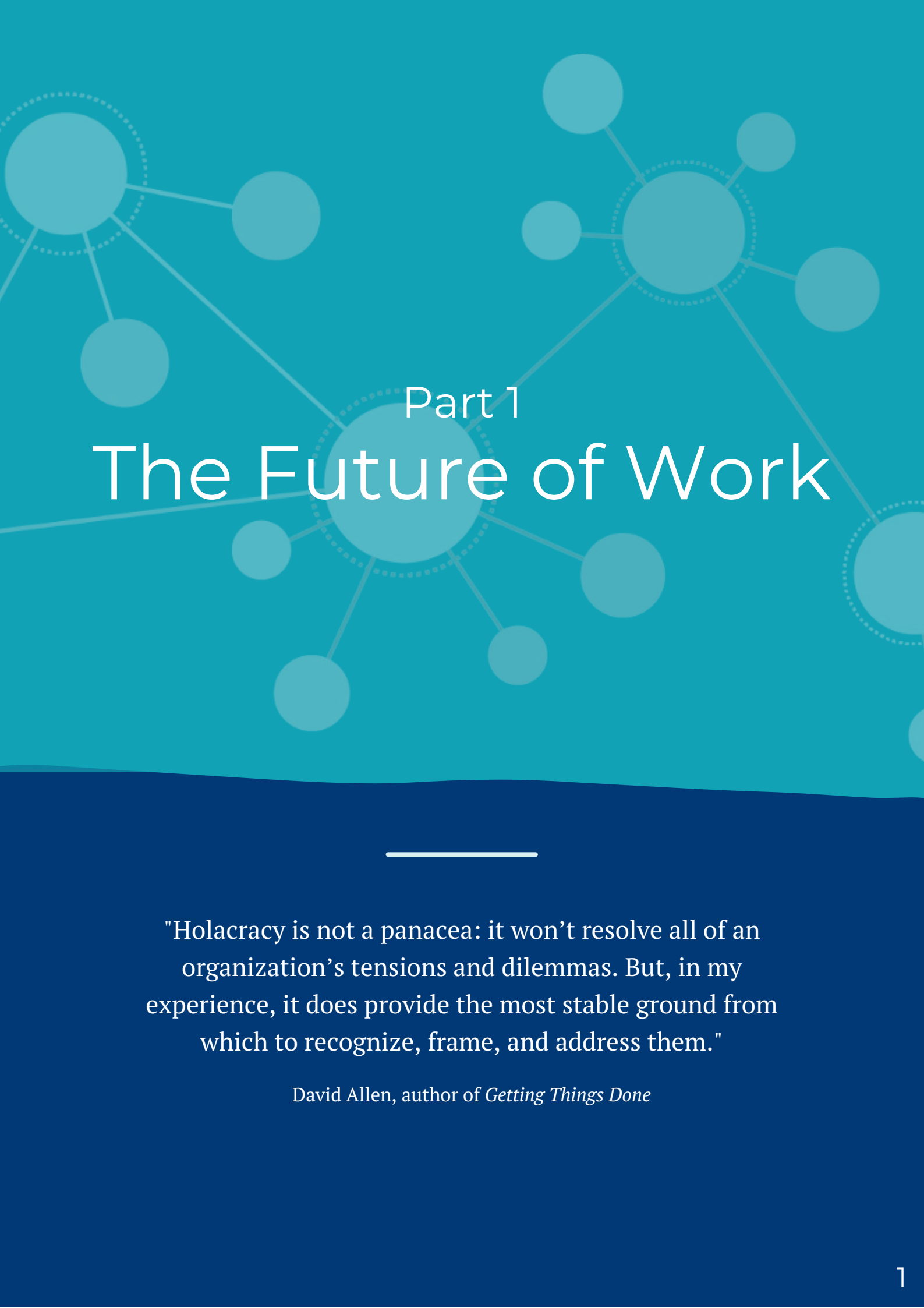


Table of Contents

Part 1: The Future of Work	1
What is Holacracy, Exactly?	3
Get Some Experience	5
What it Means to "Adopt" Holacracy	6
Holacracy Providers	7
One Practice, Many Paths	8
Your Unique Challenges	10
Support Tools	11
 Part 2: Clarifying Your Initial Structure	 12
Getting Clear	13
Governance Records	14
Example: Head Chef	15
Role vs Soul	18
Anatomy of a Role <i>[Diagram]</i>	19
Understanding Circles	21
The Circle Lead Role	23
Understanding Policies	24
Learning the Terminology	25
 Part 3: The Capture Process	 26
A. Create a GlassFrog Account	27
B. Determine the Exploration Team	28
C. Collect Your Data	29
Do You Have a Circle?	29
Message Template <i>[Diagram]</i>	30
D. Review Your Data	31
Tips & Mistakes to Avoid	31
E. Enter Your Data	34
 Part 4: Conclusion	 36
What's Next	37
 Appendix	 38
5 Articles of Self-Organization <i>[Chart]</i>	39
About the Author	40



Part 1

The Future of Work

"Holacracy is not a panacea: it won't resolve all of an organization's tensions and dilemmas. But, in my experience, it does provide the most stable ground from which to recognize, frame, and address them."

David Allen, author of *Getting Things Done*

The Future of Work

It's increasingly clear that the way we structure companies is at odds with the chaotic, fast-changing reality of today's world. Organizations are, by default, built on an industrial-age, predict-and-control hierarchical model.

This type of managerial method worked well for the stable and efficient production required by 19th-century factories.

But as management expert Gary Hamel points out, "The world is becoming more turbulent than organizations are becoming adaptable. Organizations were not built for these kinds of changes."

So, what kinds of organizations *are* built for these changes?

Leaders have tried to make their organizations more adaptable and more self-organizing. They've tried to empower people to make decisions and take ownership. And they've tried to do all of this while juggling the expectations of customers and employees—rallying everyone in a shared vision and purpose.



We've shifted from stable production work to turbulent knowledge work.



Frederick LaLoux highlights in his book, *Reinventing Organizations*, that there is another way: implementing an existing and proven set of self-management practices. He states:



"Adopting an existing set of practices like Holacracy can make the transition much smoother and faster. You benefit from accumulated insight gained by people who have put innovative practices to the test and refined them over and over again."

What is Holacracy, Exactly?

Holacracy is a framework for replacing top-down management with a self-organized, peer-to-peer model that can work in any company. How can it do that?

Well, through the experimentation of hundreds of companies practicing Holacracy, it turns out that the fundamentals of effective organization are fairly consistent. And one of the most obvious things all organizations share is that they are all unique!

Meaning, Holacracy evolved into a consistent and stable self-management system that allows for as much flexibility and customization as possible. Too much customization and the organization loses stability. Too much structure and you'll stifle innovation.

So, rather than defining everything for you, Holacracy simply provides a way for your organization to strike the right balance for itself. And to continually evolve and adapt that balance over time in response to the changing world around it.

Holacracy, then, is an out-of-the-box approach to evolutionary management. It's grounded in a core set of transparent rules that apply to everyone in the organization. This means that each company practicing Holacracy is following the same foundational rules (defined in the Holacracy Constitution), even though each has its own unique culture, products, and policies.

For example, there is a rule called the Duty of Transparency that requires all partners, upon request of any other partner, to provide transparency into their current projects, what progress has been made, and when they think they'll complete it. However, this rule says nothing about what those projects should be, or when someone should ask about them.

This means there's actually a lot that Holacracy doesn't do. That's by design. There are so many context-dependent aspects to running a successful business. Holacracy gives you a system with some basic tools, and the system empowers individuals in your company to use those tools to take action when they sense that something in the organization could be better.

“Holacracy has propagated leadership throughout the organization, not in the managerial sense, like you're the manager so now you technically lead a group of people.

It's given people a say in the governance and tactical meetings, and just in general knowing who does what and having a framework for resolving tensions.”

– Phil Caravaggio, Precision Nutrition

Get Some Experience

While we hope that reading this guide is helpful, we need to pause briefly and highlight the importance of getting some experience yourself of what it is like to actually work this way.

Building a sustainable Holacracy practice involves significant time, but getting started is relatively straightforward. Everything in Holacracy is *tension-driven*, meaning, it is driven by real-life experience, not theory.

So, before investing time and money into a Holacracy adoption, we recommend you get some real-life experience with your team and evaluate its fit for your organization.



Talk with a Coach

Work with a Certified Holacracy Coach to deliver an in-house Discovery Session. You'll visualize what your organization would look like with Holacracy, test out the meeting practices using your team's real challenges and issues, and spend time diving deep into the practical "How will this work?" questions with an experienced coach.



Attend a Training

Send your key leadership team to a Holacracy Practitioner Training. This interactive training will give you a hands-on learning experience designed to quickly get you up to speed on the basics of Holacracy practice. You'll learn foundational skills and start new habits that will enable you to thrive in a Holacracy-powered organization.

What it Means to "Adopt" Holacracy

Once you've decided to adopt (or even just experiment with) Holacracy, you'll discover that much of your success hinges upon the clarity of your commitment. The mindset and habit changes required to catalyze self-organization and an entrepreneurial culture are difficult and deeply rewarding. And we've learned from over a decade of experience that the benefits of this practice aren't fully realized when adopting mere fragments.

So, whether you decide to adopt all five articles in the Holacracy Constitution or a select few incrementally (more on that later), adopting Holacracy means the same rules apply to everyone. Maybe you'll run a 3-month experiment. Maybe you've already committed to never going back to traditional management. However you decide to adopt, communicate clearly what rules you're following and why.



Becoming familiar with the new language and working rhythms associated with the practice takes time, so if leaders don't create the conditions for a supportive transition then your team will experience a lot of unnecessary frustration.

As with any change that meaningfully impacts people, set realistic expectations and communicate inclusively and regularly. Doing so creates a sense of shared psychological safety that's essential for a flourishing self-management practice.

At the deepest level, adopting Holacracy is about building evolution into an organization's DNA. It's a liberating meta-structure designed to unleash creativity, innovation, and dynamism in service of the organization's purpose.

Holacracy Providers

Your best option for getting support through the critical and challenging first months of an adoption is to work with a licensed Holacracy Provider. If your budget doesn't permit you to work with a coach, there are a number of steps outlined below that will be critical for helping your team learn and adapt to the change. And if you're not sure where to start, you can set up a call with a Holacracy Coach.

You can find Holacracy Providers around the world, offering services in-person and virtually, and in many languages: [List of Holacracy Providers](#)



HolacracyOne



dwarfs
and
Giants



ENERGIZED.org

One Practice, Many Paths

Historically, when organizations adopted Holacracy, they ratified the entire Holacracy Constitution from the very beginning. While this approach invites everyone into the deep end of an immersive learning experience, it's also a bigger commitment.

We've responded to the need for an easier adoption path by introducing version 5.0 of the Holacracy Constitution, which enables a modular adoption approach.

The modular approach means that an organization begins with adopting the first article of the Constitution, which is about translating the organization's current structure and way of working into defined Holacracy constructs. This allows for an elegant evolutionary process, which is driven by each organization's unique needs, as each subsequent article is adopted.

Adopting article 1 may be enough for your organization. Or adopting some combination of articles. It's all about your organization's unique needs. For any articles that aren't adopted, the organization will just continue to use its current policies and processes. (Note: GlassFrog® is also now customizable, supporting all types of hierarchies and structures.)



Article	Description	Business Value
1	Organizational Structure • Provides a framework for other articles as it translates the current organizational structure into a Holacratic role structure. • Defines the elements of a role (e.g., "accountability," "domain") and the role's core expectations. • Defines a group of roles that share a common purpose as a "circle."	Increase Role Clarity • Create clarity on what roles are needed to get work done, and who is accountable for which business results. • A good way to capture the work people are really doing and know what can be expected of each other in roles.
2	Rules of Cooperation • Establishes that people are expected to make work more transparent, track their projects, next actions, and resources in some sort of shared system. • Establishes clear fundamental prioritization rules like the need to prioritize the initial processing of requests over other work, attend meetings upon request over your own work, and cover needs over individual role needs.	Increase Cooperation & Alignment • Common rules so how people can request work, respond to requests, and track work, that don't require constant getting involved. • Common rules about how to request work from others or move your work with demand.
3	Tactical Meetings • Organizational perspective: Meetings that move quickly, have focused discussions, create clear accountability, and capture actions and projects. • Individual perspective: Meetings where you can be heard and a safe space for you to get help on items.	More Efficient Operational Meetings • Establishes rules for operational meetings where agendas are built dynamically, and there is a focus on only one item at a time. • Adds easy-to-use agenda forms that are based on discussions about general topics, to a focus on specific and individual needs.
4	Distributed Authority • Contains the "Golden Rules," which express role filters to act on any action needed to serve their role's purpose, and the expectation that they create their own items. • Describes how legacy policies are handled since it may take some time to transition and update old policies and procedures.	Increase Team Member Autonomy • Adopt rules that help distribute authority to various roles and fully embrace the concept of self-organization. • Create clarity on how legacy systems compare with the ability to modify and adapt roles.
5	Governance Process • Defines rules for how to introduce authority changes in the organization's structure and role definitions, i.e., each person on the team has equal opportunities, through this process, to propose changes which are then vetted by others on the team.	Inclusive Approach to Self-Structuring • A collaborative approach for proposing changes to improve how we work together, that requires everyone on the team. • Promote that allows people to propose changes to the organization's design that helps address their roles or respond better to customers.

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Check out the appendix for more details!

While there are many ways to adopt Holacracy, this does not mean there are infinite ways, or that adopting various rules without laying a proper foundation is recommended. From our experience working with hundreds of companies, adopting the Constitution in its entirety can be the most straightforward path, but requires early buy-in from a cross-section of stakeholders.

Understandably, some organizations may feel that adopting all at once may create too much change for an organization. This can be especially true if you have a large and established organization that is still deeply rooted in the hierarchical approach to organizing. Taking a modular adoption approach (which we also strongly recommend doing with coaching support) can help your organization's change management challenges at the cost of introducing more complexity in the adoption process.

Organizations that are relatively new, small, or already have a strong culture of empowering the workforce may want to choose full adoption to avoid unnecessary complexity. As always, it's up to you. But to help you make an informed decision, once again, we strongly recommend scheduling a free consultation from a certified [Holacracy Coach](#) or attending a [training session](#).

”

“We adopted Holacracy with a bit of help along the way. We learned a lot, and I feel proud of our Holacracy competency. But, if I had to do it all again, I would make some different choices. I think that hiring a coach would have reduced our adoption time and frustration.”

– Peter Aprile, Founder & Tax Litigator at CounterTax



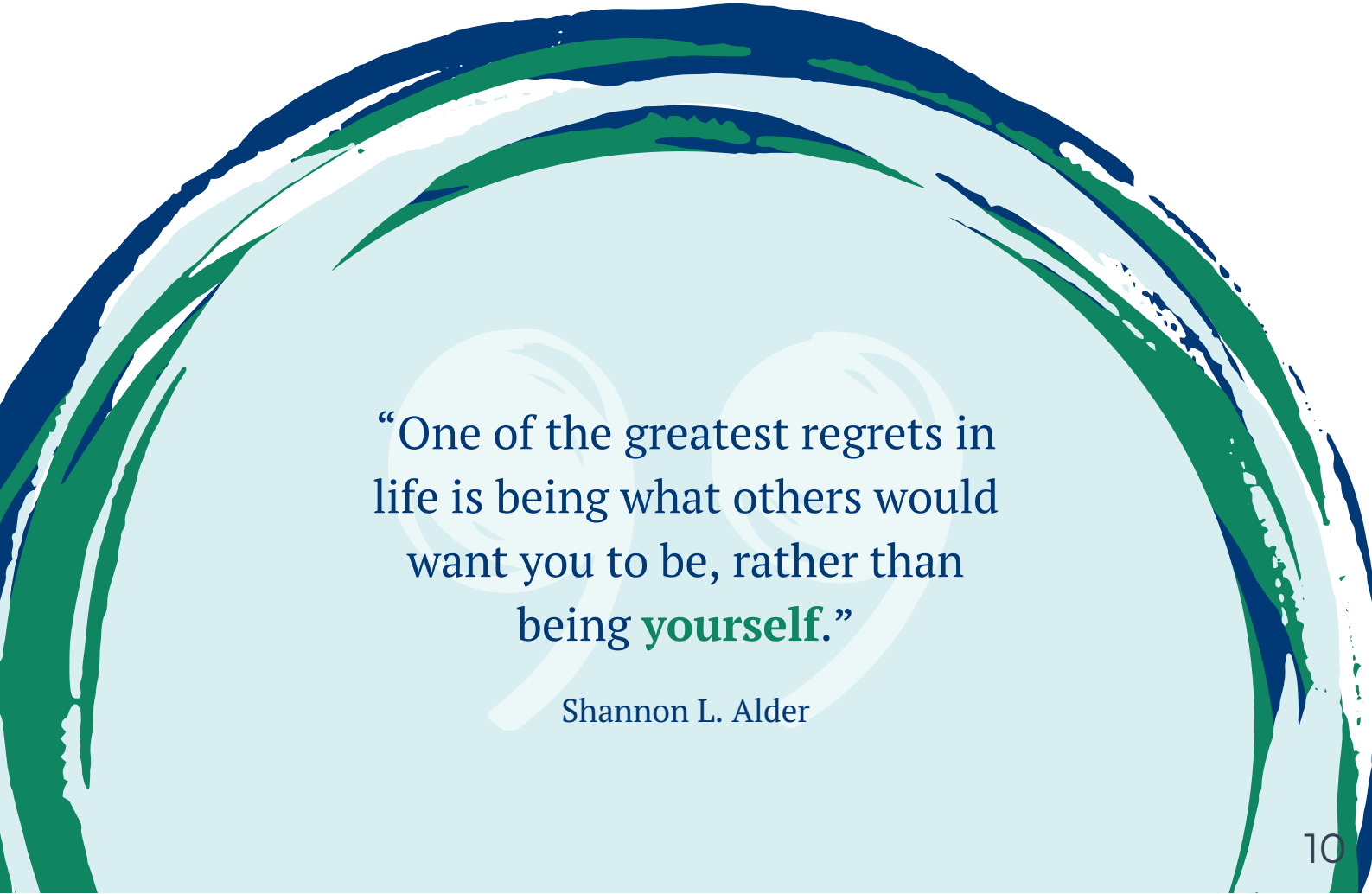
Your Unique Challenges

Of course, each organization's journey is unique. And either of these two general paths can be customized even further. Full adoption never looks exactly the same.

Some relatively-flat organizations struggle with too much consensus, while some traditional ones struggle with too much micromanagement. Each organization has slightly different points of emphasis.

Similarly, you would expect each modular adoption to be different, but some patterns have emerged. For example, we generally advise adopting articles 1, 2, and 3—which focus on role clarity, the rules of cooperation, and meeting structure, respectively—together as a starting point, because in some ways it's even easier than just trying to adopt article 1 alone.

The reasons for this are beyond the scope of this guide, but we mentioned their existence to once again highlight the value of having external coaching from a licensed provider.



“One of the greatest regrets in life is being what others would want you to be, rather than being **yourself**.”

Shannon L. Alder

Regardless of your chosen path, and regardless of whether you seek out external coaching, the initial few steps of Holacracy adoption are always the same: start with translating your current organizational structure into a Holacracy-style structure made up of circles and roles.

If you do nothing else, translating your current organizational structure into a Holacracy-style org chart (as explained in Part 2) will dramatically improve your organization's ability to thrive on clarity of purpose, authority, and accountability.

Support Tools



[Community](#)



[Online Courses](#)



[Blog](#)



[GlassFrog](#)



[Reference Tools](#)



[Trainings](#)



Part 2

Clarifying Your Initial Structure

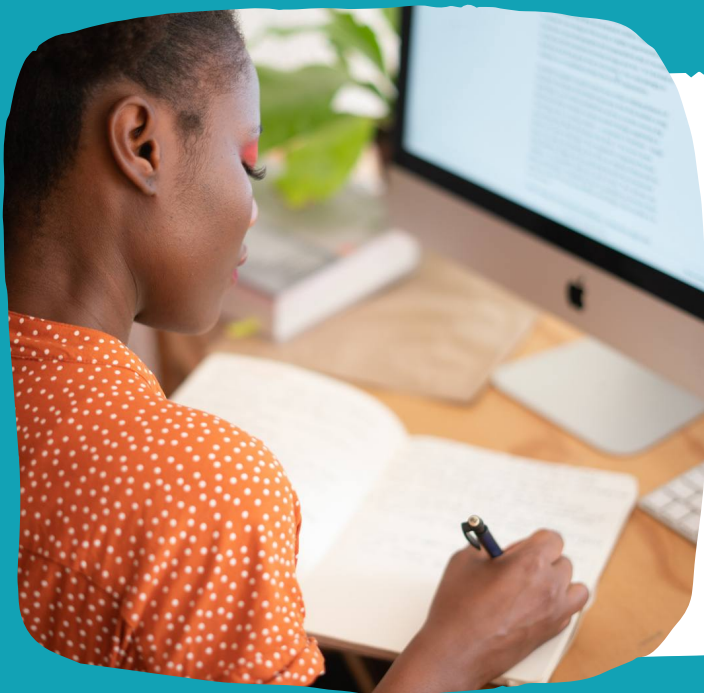
"In some ways, clarifying a vision is easy. A more difficult challenge comes in facing current reality."

Peter Senge, systems scientist and author of *The Fifth Discipline*

Getting Clear

In this section, we'll explain some of Holacracy's basic terminology, as well as provide a broad view of how initial structuring works. Part 3 will cover the specific concrete steps, as well as provide lots of advice and pitfalls to avoid.

While the potential of self-organization and distributed authority are no doubt seductive, the exciting journey begins with the seemingly mundane task of clarifying how things currently work. The roughest winds require the firmest roots, so it is to the roots we must first look.



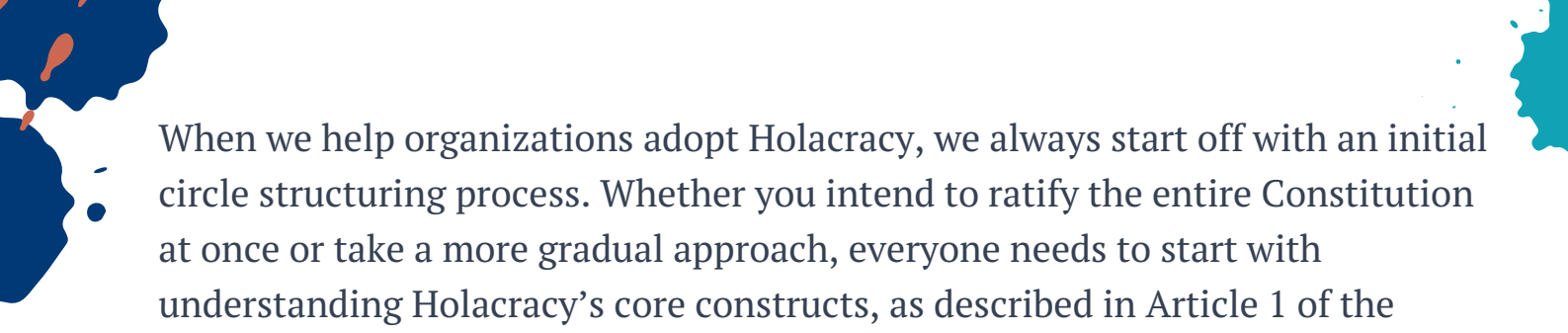
Active Learning

Try it out!

If you learn best by doing, you can create a free GlassFrog® account and get started with a sandbox organization.

New accounts get a one-month free trial of GlassFrog® Premium. You'll get access to learning tools like Holacracy Habits® and group Q&A sessions with Certified Holacracy Coaches.

Want a second free month? Request it from support@glassfrog.com and tell us you're reading this guide!



When we help organizations adopt Holacracy, we always start off with an initial circle structuring process. Whether you intend to ratify the entire Constitution at once or take a more gradual approach, everyone needs to start with understanding Holacracy's core constructs, as described in Article 1 of the Constitution.

The purpose is to translate how things currently work into a Holacracy-style structure, meaning the organization's starting roles and circles as well as any domains or policies that are needed. We'll define those terms in a moment.

It's important to note that at this point, the only purpose is to translate how things are currently working. Though the motivation to adopt Holacracy is driven by the need for certain changes, it is a mistake to start by crafting a structure based on your vision of how you think things should be.

Instead, Holacracy practice begins by translating current reality. The practice is about bringing an evolutionary mechanism inside the organization, which allows the initial structure, once documented, to change and evolve as necessary. Let's look at an example.



Governance Records

An organization's unique and evolving map of authorities, expectations, and restrictions, that may only be defined through the organization's governance process. These records include defined circles, roles, and policies.

Example: A Head Chef

Imagine a restaurant is adopting Holacracy. Each employee has a conventional job description, but those descriptions don't capture everyone's relevant ongoing activities and expectations. But now that team is transitioning to a Holacracy structure, they need to establish their starting role structure by defining their initial roles.



While Sam's official job description may be something like "Head Chef," when we try to capture her work into Holacracy-style roles, her conventional job description alone isn't very helpful. We need to capture current reality, which means we need to take a fresh look at what Sam actually does. And we also need to know which meaningful areas of work we should differentiate from each other.



Let's say after some conversation with Sam, we discover three meaningful areas of focus that can be captured as Sam's starting roles:

Menu Creator

Planning menus and setting prices, making adjustments as needed based on the availability of ingredients.

Kitchen Director

Directing kitchen operations, including cooking and cleanup, during lunch and dinner services.

Trainer

Recruiting, hiring, and training or coordinating training for chefs, cooks, and kitchen staff.

In addition, Sam tells us that while normally a Head Chef would also be responsible for food preparation and equipment maintenance, in her case, those responsibilities have actually been delegated to others. That means we potentially have some other roles, which are currently being filled by other people:

Food Prep

Controlling and directing the food preparation process and any other relative activities.

Equipment Manager

Maintaining kitchen equipment; scheduling repairs and additional maintenance as needed.



And actually, as it turns out, in addition to her normal Head Chef duties, Sam has also been taking on the responsibility of making staff schedules while the assistant manager is recovering from surgery. This gives us another role for Sam: Shift Shaper.

This role is currently filled by Sam, but when the normal role-filler returns, she can hand it back. So we've captured four starting roles for Sam, and with each subsequent conversation with everyone else (or a selection of key team members) in the organization, we are further on our way to building out the initial structure.

Shift Shaper

Organizing staff schedules
and keeping track of
employees' hours.



"In Holacracy, the roles are visible, so everyone can see them, including the person who's holding the role. So you see people referencing them in their work, both to make requests of others or to understand who they should be talking to or understand why someone is talking to them. They play a more vibrant role in the actual day-to-day work of the organization in ways that job descriptions just don't."



– Michael Y. Lee, Assistant Professor of Organisational Behaviour at INSEAD

Role vs Soul

This brings us to one of the most important distinctions between how Holacracy defines and captures structure compared to other ways of organizing: in Holacracy, roles are different from people.

That means a single person will fill multiple roles at the same time, and multiple people can fill the same role. And since everyone on the team also has multiple roles, an organization of 8 people may actually have 12, 20, or any number of distinct roles.

In addition, a given role doesn't necessarily take up a predefined amount of time. Someone may fill a role that they only spend 10 minutes energizing each week, or for a few hours every quarter.

So, instead of using a single job description, we use roles to define discrete functional units of work, which are defined and updated in the organization's governance process. They include one or more of the following elements: accountabilities, purpose, and/or domain.



We move through different roles
throughout our daily lives.

Anatomy of a Role

Role Name

Purpose

Defines the overall scope of the work that the role should care about. This construct is, by design, different from an accountability in that it's the deepest creative capacity the role can express. These tend to be aspirational. Example: Accountant Role, "Protect the books from chaos."

Domains

Restrictions and boundaries can be defined by giving exclusive control of something to certain roles. For example, a domain of "Website" means that others cannot change something on the company website without asking the specified role for permission first. Domains are one of the main ways to define restrictions in Holacracy, because they require explicit permission up front.

Accountabilities

Clearly defined expectations and responsibilities, which anyone can rely upon to request work. Accountabilities are ongoing activities of the role, which is why you always see them written with an "-ing" verb at the beginning. Example: "Providing IT support." So, if someone on the team needs IT support, they can point to that role's accountability as an agreed-upon expectation.

So, looking back at Sam's starting roles, they might actually look more like this:

Menu Creator

Purpose

Delicious food that dazzles our customers

Accountabilities

- Planning menus and setting prices, making adjustments as needed based on the availability of ingredients.
- Assisting kitchen staff with food prep and recipe creation.

Kitchen Director

Accountabilities

- Directing kitchen operations, including cooking and cleanup, during lunch and dinner services.
- Inspecting any raw and uncooked food items before serving to customers.

Trainer

Purpose

The right people doing the right things

Domain

Kitchen Staff Hiring

Accountabilities

- Recruiting, hiring, and training or coordinating training for chefs, cooks, and kitchen staff.

Shift Shaper

Accountabilities

- Organizing staff schedules and keeping track of employees' hours.



Again, the goal here isn't to perfect these definitions. They should be accurate, but they needn't be exhaustive. They will continually be changing and evolving over time based on the emerging needs of the organization.

Understanding Circles

In Holacracy, a circle is a grouping of roles that share a common purpose. You might loosely think of them as “teams,” although not all teams make good circles.

The organization as a whole will be one circle. And unless the organization is very small, then the governance structure will likely also have sub-circles within it.

Using the restaurant example from before, we might imagine a “Kitchen” circle that includes several roles responsible for the back-of-house operations:

Kitchen

Purpose

An amazing dining experience people tell their friends about about

Domains

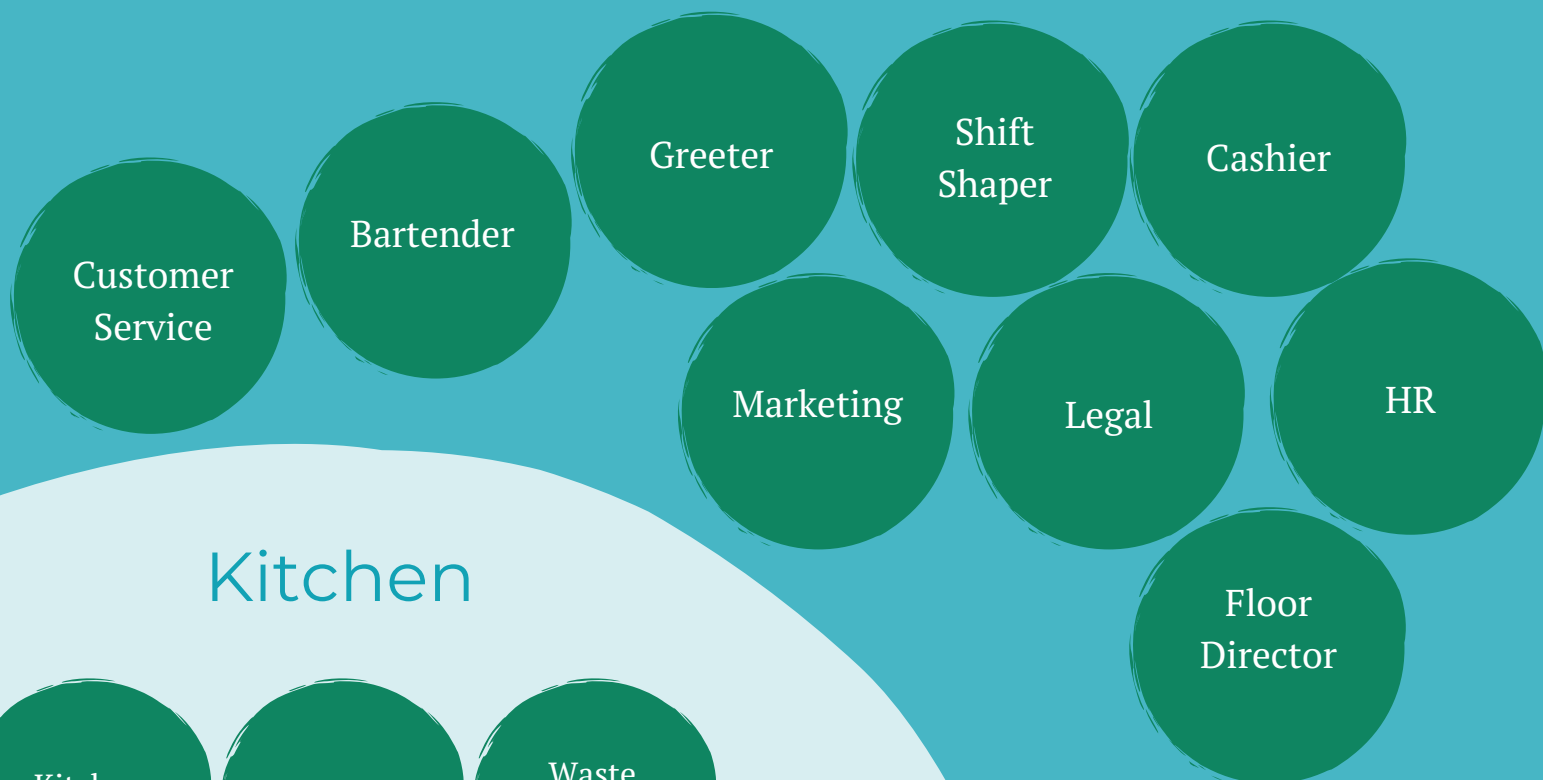
- Kitchen equipment
- Hiring process for kitchen staff

Accountabilities

- Delivering food to customers
- Managing kitchen inventory

Notice that this sub-circle includes most of Sam's roles, but not all of them. Some of Sam's roles will sit in the broader General Company Circle (GCC), which is the broadest circle of the organization. We could then envision the whole restaurant looking like this:

General Company Circle (GCC)



Kitchen



You can see in this example that “Kitchen” is a sub-circle of the General Company Circle (GCC) – both of which have roles within them.

In fact, from the perspective of the GCC, the Kitchen sub-circle is treated like any other role. And if the whole sub-circle is like a role, who fills that role? That would be the Circle Lead.

The Circle Lead Role

Typically, any existing managers or team leads will become the Circle Leads of their respective circles. The Circle Lead holds the overall purpose of the circle, holds a domain over role assignments (i.e. who can be in which roles), and holds all of the circle's accountabilities (but only until they are covered by or delegated to other roles in their circle).

It's important to understand at this point that the Circle Lead, as a specific and distinct role, holds limited powers. Any other authorities or operational work that a traditional manager might have or perform should be captured in distinct roles (which the same person might fill in many cases).

To use the previous example, imagine that the former “Head Chef” is also now the person filling the Circle Lead role of the Kitchen sub-circle. As Circle Lead, they have some unique authorities (e.g. setting priorities), but their subject-matter expertise is captured in other operational roles like, Menu Creator, Trainer, and Kitchen Director.

Other duties a traditional manager might have like hiring or firing, setting compensation, etc., should also be covered in other roles, or through policies.



Understanding Policies

While roles and circles provide clear boundaries with clear accountabilities, a policy is a grant or constraint of authority, or a special rule which limits how something must be done.

For example, the General Company Circle may have a policy which states “No one may offer a customer a refund unless it is first approved by the Floor Director role.” In this case, a policy is needed to explicitly restrict a certain type of activity, because accountabilities, by definition, don’t prevent others from doing something; they only tell you who you can *expect* to do something.

And if that difference isn’t perfectly clear, don’t worry. Because in the beginning, we generally don’t recommend capturing a lot of policies (or domains) in your starting structure, because any relevant ones can be translated/added as needed.

Remember, the starting structure is just the beginning of a never-ending process. The goal isn’t to get it right the first time so you can set it aside and never think about it again. The goal is simply to create a firm foundation for the rest of your journey.



Learning the Terminology

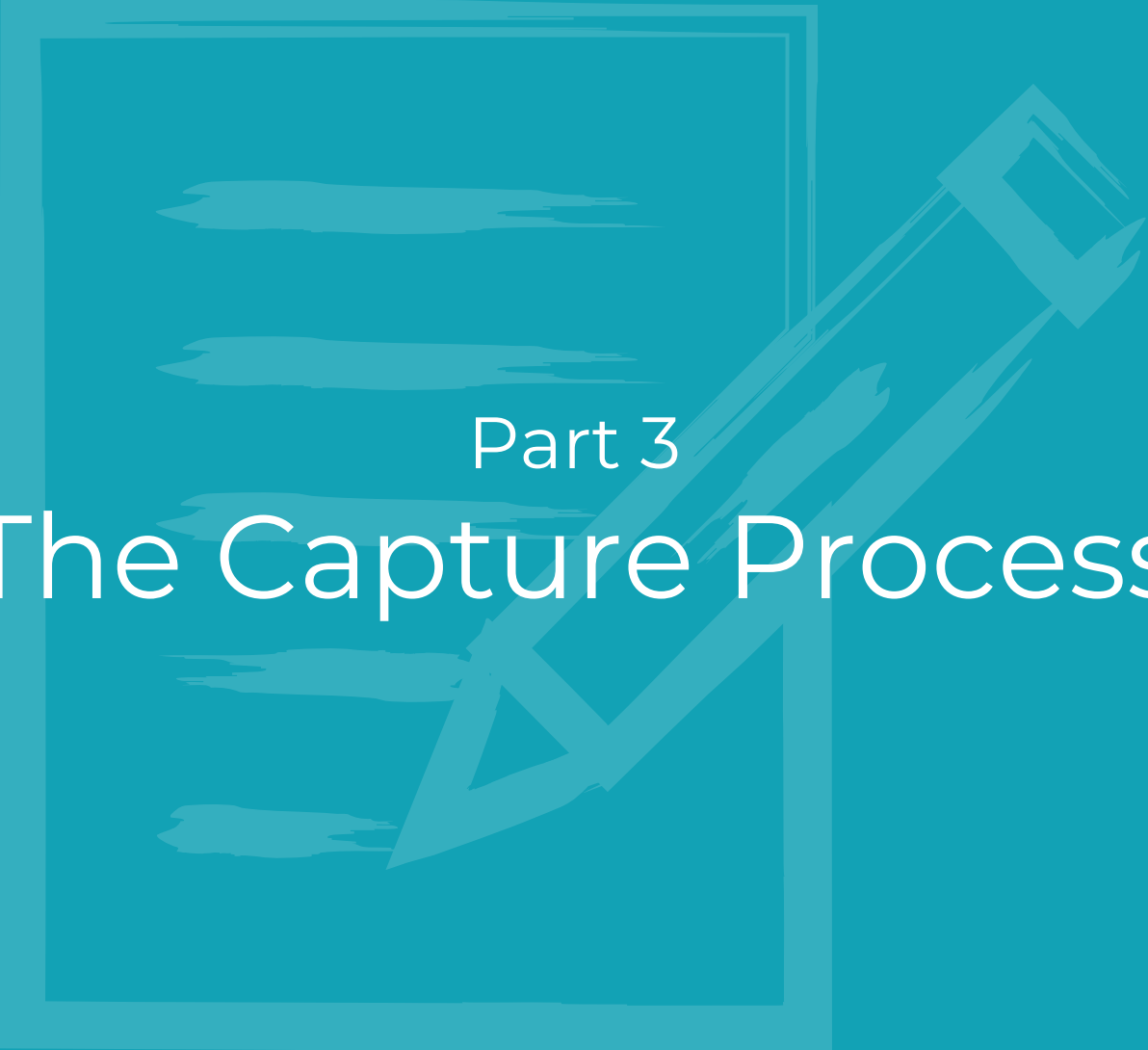
If terms like “roles” and “policies” still seem vague to you, that’s fine. You don’t need to master the terminology to get started. In this guide, we’re only introducing you to broad definitions of how these things work. A detailed understanding takes time (and it’s another reason why getting hands-on assistance can save your organization time and confusion).



In organizations where teams are the natural unit, Holacracy provides perhaps the most elegant process to define roles and help them evolve.

– Frederic Laloux, *Reinventing Organizations*

Learning Holacracy does involve learning some new language. It may be awkward at times in the beginning, but eventually it’s not something you have to think about anymore. In this section, we introduced the basic terms and highlighted a bit about how they work, but it’s the next section that will really help you put them into practice.

A stylized illustration of a hand-drawn box with a pencil and an eraser. The box is light blue with a darker blue border. Inside the box, there are several horizontal brush strokes. A pencil is drawn diagonally across the box, and an eraser is at the top right corner of the box.

Part 3

The Capture Process

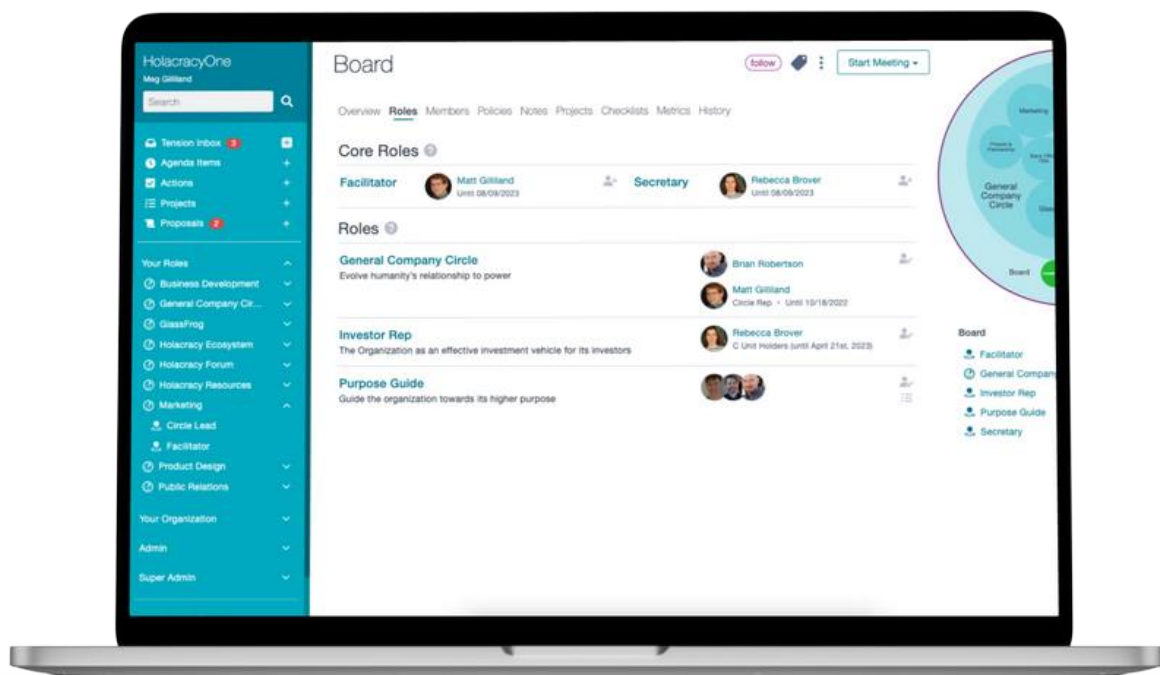
"The way to get started is to
quit talking and begin doing."

Walt Disney

Now that the basic terms have been explained, let's get concrete. What are the actual steps involved in capturing your initial structure?

A Create a GlassFrog Account

The first step is to create a GlassFrog account. GlassFrog is a tool (originally designed by HolacracyOne) to provide a trustworthy and easily accessible repository to store your company's unique governance records. **You can start by setting up a free account to test it out.** If you subscribe to GlassFrog Premium, you'll also be able to access features to help you teach your team the Holacracy rules and practices. For now, just create the account (which comes with a free month of GlassFrog Premium). You'll enter your starting structure in Step E.



The official software to support your
Holacracy practice.

<https://www.glassfrog.com>

B Determine the Exploration Team

The next task is to identify a team of three to ten people who will go through the initial structuring process. Based on our experience, a good candidate team is either the organization's executive team (e.g. CEO, VPs, etc.), or the leadership team of whichever part of the organization is exploring Holacracy.

The top executive team doesn't necessarily have to be involved for Holacracy to succeed, as long as the group adopting the practice has enough autonomy to make that decision for themselves. In cases like that, it's important to have a group of people who regularly work together and meet to discuss the work, and not a group of people from different teams who are not used to meeting.

Please note the exploration team is the one that will be adopting Holacracy for their internal operations. Those may not necessarily be the same people who have the authority to decide whether or not to adopt Holacracy. If it's not obvious who should be involved, we've got some questions to help below.

It's possible that you will come up with a different list of people in response to each question, or they may overlap. Seek guidance from your colleagues as needed and thoughtfully consider the diverse perspectives you'll want to incorporate during this exploration process.

Imagine the CEO and VPs (or equivalent) are meeting to discuss the overall operations and strategy of the organization. Who else do you think should be in the room so that it would be a productive meeting?

Make a list of those people and explain in 1-2 sentences why you think their presence is important.

The decision to adopt Holacracy is a significant one. Who are the key people in the organization that you believe need to be involved in making that decision? Consider involving people across the entire hierarchy to help socialize the decision.

Make a list of those people and explain in 1-2 sentences why you think their unique perspectives are important.



Collect Your Data

The data collection process has a few steps of its own. Rather than referring to existing job descriptions, we recommend requesting data directly from those doing the work. This can be done relatively quickly and asynchronously.

You don't need to capture absolutely everything, but you should aim to capture roughly 80% of the current ongoing activities. Because there are many common pitfalls (especially in the tendency to over-design), and mistakes can cost your team valuable time that could be better-spent elsewhere, the help of a licensed Holacracy provider can be a great investment during the data collection and structuring process.

First, if there are any potential sub-circles, start with them. The clearer you are about how many circles you'll likely have, the easier the data collection will be.

You can refer to "Do You Have a Circle?" in the sidebar for reference, but an intuitive guess is fine. The most common mistake is to "over-circle;" i.e. creating a circle in every context in which a team of people work together. For example, smaller organizations of fewer than 8 people are almost always a single circle.

Defining the circle (i.e. accountabilities, domain, purpose) can be done by the existing team lead, or whomever is in the best position to make that judgment call. Remember, the point isn't to get it 100% perfect, but just good enough to get started; any corrections can be made as part of the ongoing evolution of the structure.

Do You Have a Circle?

- The circle members constitute a team that is currently working together.
- You predict they have at least 3 differentiated roles within the circle.
- At least 3 people will be filling roles in the circle, occupying a substantial, ongoing amount of their work-time.

In order to collect the data the initial role definitions are formed from, a questionnaire is often a good starting point. The following is an example of a message you could send out:

Can you answer two quick questions? (If you are not able to, don't worry; I have a backup plan.) Please spend no more than 15 minutes on this.

A. Describe your ongoing work in 1 to 4 short sentences, each starting with an -ing verb (e.g. "Designing..." "Writing..."). Reflect back over the past month or two. Focus on what you *actually* did, not what you do in principle, what you should be doing, or what your job description says. Here are some examples from other roles for inspiration:

- Delivering contracted services.
- Prospecting and closing new business.
- Scheduling and coordinating marketing events.

Go for clarity and brevity, not thoroughness. Look back at your calendar to remind you. What do you do on an ongoing basis? Write brief bullet points for your various roles, even if informal at the moment.

B. Sort any bullets into categories if there seems to be more than one type of activity. Give each category a 1-2 word name (role name).

C. What would "wild" success look like for each of your role(s)? Said another way, why does this role exist? For each role, only write one sentence. This will be the "purpose" for a role. A good purpose can inspire creative action and reduce the need for extensive accountabilities. Here are some examples:

- Amazing products that work every time.
- Worry about basic systems, so no one else has to.
- Guard the books from chaos.

D. Please send your write up to me in whatever format you have. No spreadsheets or detailed reports are needed.

Remember, the intention of the initial structuring exercise is to create a skeleton structure so that each person has one or more roles to get things started. These roles can easily be changed via the Holacracy governance process, so try to let go of needing 100% clarity, an exhaustive list, or a "final answer." Holacracy will allow you to evolve the structure over time.



Review Your Data

At this point, you've gathered lots of information. A majority of it will be usable as-is, but some isn't. That's to be expected, since these distinctions are new (and even people who have some experience with Holacracy may struggle to define their work clearly). Once again, we recommend getting some outside help from experts with this process, but regardless here are some things to look out for:

Tips & Mistakes to Avoid

General Tips

- If you anticipate having any sub-circles, **start with them**. It helps to get the sub-circle's Circle Lead(s) involved in the data gathering process for the roles in their circles.
- Prioritize circles that have **concrete operational work** (e.g. Engineering) over those which provide more oversight or supervision.
- Remember, a sub-circle should have a defined purpose and accountabilities just like a role has. Ask yourself, "**What are the expected outputs and activities from that team?**" Anything other roles in the organization need to expect from that circle should be defined in the circle as a whole—how the roles are defined within that sub-circle can be thought of as the way that circle has decided to organize itself to deliver the expectations placed upon it.

Tips & Mistakes to Avoid

(continued)

Role Tips

- Make sure everyone in the team has at least one role. If you think someone should be involved, but they don't have a defined role, think harder, or leave them out.
- Ask yourself, "Is all of the circle's major work/activity captured?" If not, add the missing pieces. Again, it doesn't need to be exhaustive: the key word is "major."
- If the Circle Lead is struggling to identify roles for themselves, ask them what they do. If they are a manager, they're probably doing many different things that can be captured in separately-defined roles.

Accountability Mistakes

- Accountabilities are too rigidly defined. Allow accountabilities to be broad and open to some interpretation. This allows role-fillers more leeway to go about their work, and it cuts out a lot of fluff or things that might be better-placed outside the role (in a policy, for example). You can always get more granular or nuanced over time. Here is an example of how you might tweak the starting accountabilities:

Before	After
"Preparing food for delivery to customers through the careful and consistent use of available ingredients and in accordance with the highest kitchen standards."	"Preparing food for customers."

Tips & Mistakes to Avoid

(continued)

Accountability Mistakes

- Too many accountabilities: Occasionally, you may have a long list of 20 different (but accurate) accountabilities for a role. That's too many. Break them down into different roles, or consolidate them by looking for repeated -ing verbs or ways activities with a similar purpose could be worded as a single accountability.

Before	After
• "Updating plans..." • "Updating records..." • "Updating schedules..."	"Updating plans, spreadsheets, and schedules."

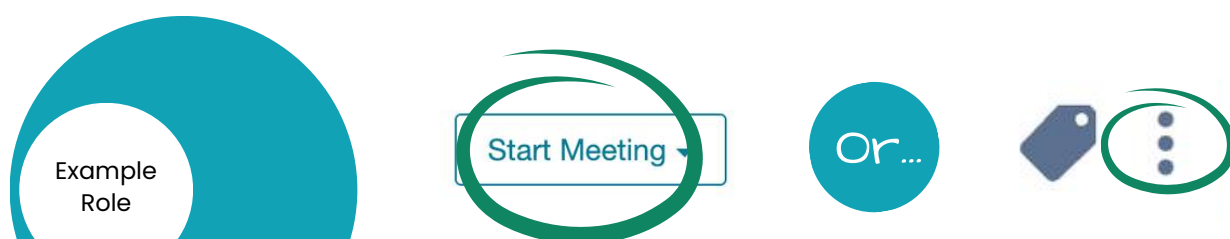
Domains & Policies Mistakes

- No policies or domains are typically captured, unless a specific need calls for one. For example, "hiring process" or "employment agreements" may need to be centralized in the beginning, but most areas can be easily addressed should an issue arise (tension).

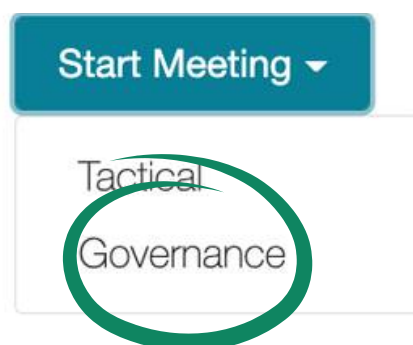
E Enter Your Data

The process of entering the information into GlassFrog is straightforward. You're going to enter your data using the same interface and the same steps you'll be using to update the governance in the future.

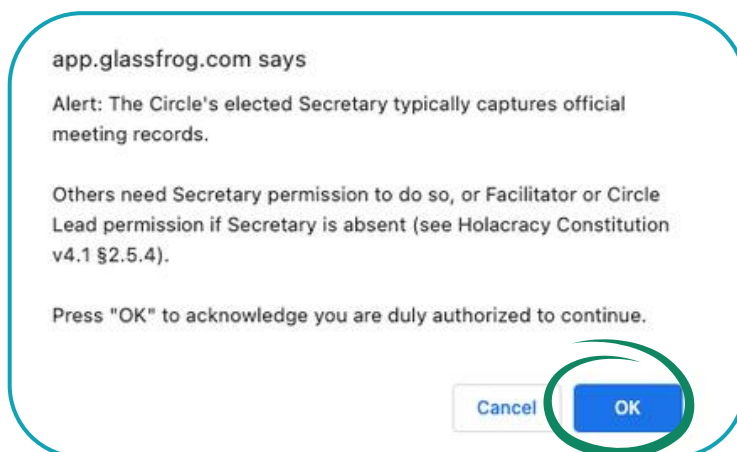
- 1 After logging into your account, click on "Start Meeting," or if you don't see "Start Meeting," then select the three vertical dots in the upper right corner to open a drop down menu, which will then show you the "Start Meeting" option.



- 2 Then, select "Governance."

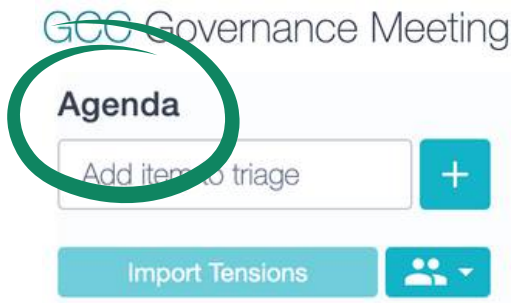


- 3 A pop-up message will then ask you if you're authorized to change the governance. Press "OK."



4

After the governance meeting interface opens, find the “Agenda” in the upper left corner, and type in anything (e.g. “aaa”) and hit Enter so the tool knows you need to add a new governance.



5

After entering an item, click to select it in the agenda that appears on the left-hand side. Once you do that, the “Add to Proposal” section opens up and you can now add the data you’ve collected.

TO ADD A ROLE

6

Select the dropdown “Add/Edit Role” and select “New Role/Circle.” Once that’s done, you can enter the role’s name, purpose, domain(s), and accountabilities.

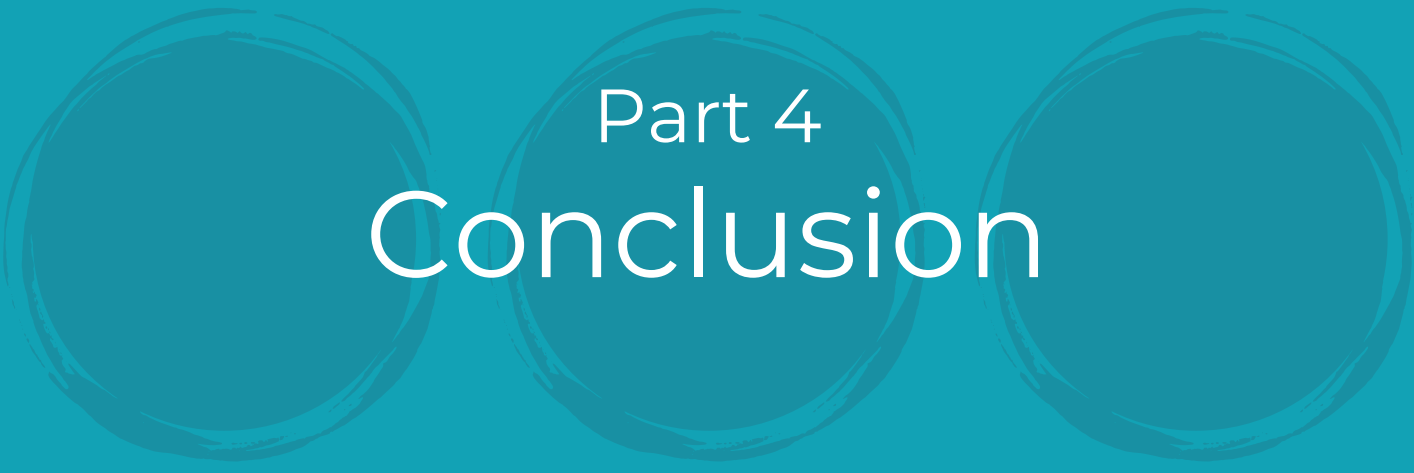
New Role/Circle

TO ADD A CIRCLE

7

If you’re capturing a new circle, enter the name, purpose, domain, and accountability fields as above, but also check the checkbox that says “Make this role a circle.”

✓ Make this role a circle



Part 4 Conclusion

"The truth will set you free. But
not until it is finished with you."

David Foster Wallace

What's Next

The evolution of management is already here. Whether you decide to adopt Holacracy or not, the way we work has changed.

No matter which path you take, evolving your company's management practices is an ongoing journey. If you adopt Holacracy in any form, leaning on this guide will help you get started. Obviously, we can't fit everything you need to know about Holacracy practice in one place, but there are many ways you can learn more.

Without question, getting adequate coaching support is the most critical factor influencing the success of Holacracy adoptions. We know, we know—we've said that a lot. But if you get stuck at any point along the way (or even before you get stuck!), reach out and set up a free consultation with a [licensed Holacracy Provider](#) to discuss your unique needs.

"Whoever travels without a guide needs two hundred years for a two-day journey."

– Rumi

Appendix

Overview of the v5.0 Constitutional Articles

Article		Description	Business Value
1	Organizational Structure	• Prerequisite for other articles as it translates the current organizational structure into a Holacracy-style structure. • Defines the elements of a role (e.g. "accountability," "domain") and the role's core expectations. • Defines a group of roles that share a common purpose as a "circle."	Increase Role Clarity • Create clarity on what roles are needed to get work done, and who is accountable for which decisions and work. • A good way to capture the work people are really doing and know what can be expected of each other in roles.
	Rules of Cooperation	• Establishes that people are expected to make work more transparent, track their projects, next-actions, and tensions in some sort of trusted system. • Establishes clear fundamental prioritization rules like the need to prioritize the initial processing of requests over other work, attend meetings upon request over your own work, and team needs over individual role needs.	Increase Cooperation & Alignment • Common rules in how people can request work, respond to requests, and track work, that don't require leaders getting involved. • Common rules about how to request work from others to move your own work forward.
	Tactical Meetings	• Organizational perspective: Meetings that move quickly, have focused discussions, create clear accountability, and capture actions and projects. • Individual perspective: Meetings where you can be heard and a safe space for you to get help on issues.	More Efficient Operational Meetings • Establishes rules for operational meetings, where agendas are built dynamically, and there is a focus on only one issue at-a-time. • Shifts away from agenda items that are broad discussions about general topics, to a focus on specific and individual needs.
	Distributed Authority	• Contains the "Golden Rule," which empowers role-fillers to take any action needed to serve their role's purpose, and the expectation that they resolve their own issues. • Describes how legacy policies are handled since it may take some time to transition and update old policies and procedures.	Increase Team Member Autonomy • Adopt rules that help distribute authority to various roles and fully embrace the concept of self-management. • Creates clarity on how legacy systems integrate with the ability to modify and adopt rules.
	Governance Process	• Defines rules for how to introduce authority changes in the organization's structure and role definitions; i.e., each person on the team has equal opportunity, through this process, to propose changes which are then vetted by others on the team.	Inclusive Approach to Self-Structuring • A collaborative approach for governing changes to improve how we work together, that engages everyone on the team. • Process that allows people to propose changes in the organization's design that helps unblock their roles or respond better to customers.

About the Author

Dr. Chris Cowan is an accomplished management consultant and leadership development expert. He joined HolacracyOne after seeing the limits of many traditional leadership development approaches that failed to address underlying organizational norms and power structures. He sees Holacracy as a practical tool for clarifying decision-making authority, which dramatically reduces politics while allowing individual creative expression.



Chris has worked with a wide variety of commercial, non-profit, and governmental clients on their manager training programs and has taught graduate courses in leadership at Harvard and Georgetown Universities.

Chris holds a Masters in Divinity from Harvard Divinity School and a doctorate in Human and Organizational Learning from George Washington University. Additionally, he's a Certified Master Holacracy Coach.

If you are interested in exploring a Holacracy adoption or simply want to learn more about what it means to be a purpose-driven organization, send a note to Chris.Cowan@HolacracyOne.com.

The End