Internalizing Freedom: Understanding the Learning Required to Onboard into a Self-managing Organization (SMO)

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Abstract

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to Onboard into a Self-managing Organization (SMO)

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This dissertation investigated the learning required for individuals to onboard into self-managing organizations (SMOs). Using a qualitative case study approach, 15 participants from various SMOs were interviewed to gain insight into their experiences. In addition, data were collected from a document review and focus group. The study found that: (a) Formal learning enabled a quick grounding in the basic mechanisms of self-management. (b) All participants faced challenges applying the principles and practices of self-management in practice. (c) All participants had to learn to shift their mindsets in order to successfully participate in self-management. (d) Transitioning into self-management was a nonlinear process that unfolded over time. For many participants, it began years before they joined an SMO and continued even after their formal onboarding period was completed. (e) Formal training supported instrumental learning, while mindset shifts were more supported by informal learning.

An analysis of these findings led to four primary conclusions. First, an organizational model cannot transcend the capabilities of its members. Second, a new relationship with self, others, and the organization required new ways of thinking and being. Third, formal and informal learning experiences amidst a supportive social context enabled this holistic transformation. Fourth, self-management is a team sport and is therefore likely only able to be learned with and through a group.

The study recommended building a learning environment and supporting new members' learning journeys to facilitate a successful transition into self-management.

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Y. L. M.

Dedication

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Rise of Alternative Organizational Designs

Organizations in the 21st century face a slew of additional challenges on top of their traditional tasks of organizing and coordinating work. As described by Ciporen (2010), “the 21st century poses many challenges to organizations and their leaders. Globalization, increased competition ... and continuous technological changes, combined with multiple reporting relationships as well as employee and customer diversity, make the requirements of leadership increasingly complex” (p. 177). Recent events, such as the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, war in Ukraine, and advancements in AI technology, have dramatically increased this complexity.

One way in which modern organizations are seeking to meet this challenge is a renewed focus on alternative organizational designs (McKinsey, 2020). This stems from a recognition that a more complex and dynamic environment requires a different organizational structure. As Robertson (2015) asserts, “our organizations today are simply not designed to rapidly evolve on the basis of inputs from many sensors” (p. 7). These new designs are often flatter and more distributed than traditional hierarchical organizations. Per Pasmore’s (1994) contention “a fixed hierarchy is antithetical to knowledge work.... The only cure for this disease is to remove the permanent hierarchy” (pp. 145-146). Variations on this theme include, Polynoetic organizations (Pasmore, 1994), Post Bureaucratic organizations (Grey & Garsten, 2001), Liberated companies (Carney & Getz, 2009), Bossless organizations (Puranam, 2014), Responsive organizations (Responsive Org, 2014), Teal organizations (Laloux, 2014), Horizontal organizations (Slade, 2018), and Evolutionary organizations (Dignan, 2019a).

The Spread of Self-Managing Organizations

The trend toward more agile and distributed organizations is most pronounced in the spread of self-managing organizations (SMOs). Unlike other efforts that seek to modify the existing organizational hierarchy, SMOs seek to completely remake it (Lee & Edmondson, 2017). Within SMOs, people manage themselves and the group without fixed hierarchical management structures.

Although relatively few and far between, these outlier organizations now span multiple continents and industries. They include small not-for-profits, as well as large publicly traded companies; manufacturing plants, and knowledge workers. What they all have in common is that they don't operate within a hierarchal organizational structure. Rather, they have evolved a way of organizing and managing that is flatter, more self-directed, and responsive to continual change.

Notable examples of self-managing companies worldwide include: FAVI (a manufacturing company), AES (a publicly traded energy company with over 40,000 employees), Buurtzorg (a nursing organization of over 8,000 nurses), W.L. Gore (a $3 billion high-tech company famous for its Gore-Tex® fabrics), Nucor (America's most profitable steel maker), Svenska Handelsbanken (a bank with more than 800 branches across Northern Europe and the UK), and General Electric's Durham, North Carolina aviation plant (Carney & Getz, 2009; Hamel & Zanini, 2016; Laloux, 2014).

While very different, these self-managing companies all operate based upon similar principles. Some of the key paradigm shifts are enumerated below:

- From people need to be controlled to people are inherently ambitious and creative (McGregor, 1960)

- From a reductionist model, that seeks to break things down into their composite parts, to a systemic approach that seeks to optimize the whole (McCrystal, 2015; Senge, 2006)

- From a predict and plan approach to one of continual iteration, sensing, and adaptation. (Laloux, 2014)

Together these paradigm shifts lead to a very different kind of organization. As articulated by Zorbist, who led the transformation at FAVI,

> There are, he said, two kinds of companies: "Comment" in French, or "How" companies and "pourquoi" or "why" companies. "How" companies spend their time telling workers how to do their jobs.... [A] pourquoi company is different. It replaces all the myriad "hows" with a single question: Why are you doing what you're doing? The answer is always the same: to keep to keep the customer happy. As long as what you do satisfied that commandment, Zorbist doesn't worry about how you do it. (as quoted in Carney & Getz, 2009, p. 17)

Outsized Results of Self-Management

In addition to demonstrating significantly higher levels of employee engagement and satisfaction, self-managing companies have also proven to have many other outsized results. One such example is SOL, a Finnish services company. "[I]n 2007 SOL grew 15 percent. Its profit margin was 8.7 percent, compared with an industry average of 3 percent to four percent . . . from 1992 through 2008, they produced 15 percent average annual growth and 8 to 9 percent profit margin" (Carney & Getz, 2009, pp. 220-222). Another example is that of Svenska Handelsbanken, whose return on equity has surpassed that of its European peers every year since 1971 (Hamel & Zanini, 2016). An American example is the gaming company Valve. "[I]n 2014, Valve was privately held and estimated to be worth upwards of USD 2 billion. Its estimated revenue per employee was higher than that of Google, Amazon, or Microsoft" (Puranam & Håkonsson, 2015, p. 2).

Challenges of Self-Management

However, self-management brings its own challenges. As described by Widrich (2015), “the amount of freedom people had, with absolutely no guidance, expectations or accountability, was pretty overwhelming.” Moreover, self-management can also be “emotionally difficult because it forces you to inspect your own ego, fears, and motivations, as you are constantly subjected to feedback and advice which shines a light on your impact on other people and the business” (Jansen, 2019, para. 3).

Furthermore, the unique structure of SMOs and the dynamics they engender can be developmentally and cognitively challenging (Haslett, 2019; Kinneen & Younas, 2018), cause social challenges (Diefenbach & Sillince, 2011; Foss & Dobrajska, 2015), and make it more difficult to align on strategy (Bernstein et al., 2016).

While covert dynamics exist in all groups (Nomair et al., 2017), it is suspected that they may be particularly prevalent in SMOs. As illustrated by research from Oedzes et al. (2017), in the absence of formal leadership, “informal hierarchies emerge most strongly” (p. 311). When unacknowledged, these informal hierarchies can fuel resentment and conflict (Warr, 2013). In addition, conditions of ambiguity have been found to increase people's anxiety, triggering individual and organizational covert defense mechanisms. Traditionally, this anxiety is contained within the formal hierarchy, as members can look to their leadership for reassurance and security (Friesen et al., 2014). However, without formal structures to contain it, the anxiety is more likely to be expressed in covert ways. Thus, the distributed nature of SMOs may make them more prone to regressive covert dynamics.

Lack of Clarity about SMOs

Despite a proliferation of articles lauding the transformative potential of SMOs, there has been limited academic study of self-management (Lee & Edmondson, 2017). In addition, "much practitioner rhetoric related to flattening hierarchies can be hyperbolic, promising occupational nirvana. Research on self-managed teams indicates that the reality of self-management is more complicated than the rhetoric" (Lee and Edmondson, 2017, p. 17).

The lack of attention paid to challenges within SMOs echoes a broader pattern:

> The new, utopian conceptions of organizational life that are in vogue now are often bereft of ideas about containment of the primitive, destructive features of human functioning, features that are inherent in organizational life, and possibly exacerbated by the increasing rates of change and fluctuation. (Krantz, 2015, p. 18)

This is especially true of SMOs, where the overall experience of members has only recently begun to be explored (Deardorff, 2020; Harjanne, 2021; Nissi, 2021). Moreover, no research has been conducted thus far on the transition into self-management, or the learning required to be successful within it. Considering the unique challenges of self-management, the lack of understanding of the learning required to successfully onboard into self-management is a significant gap.

Problem Statement

Despite the growing proliferation of self-managing organizations, there is little research on the learning required to successfully onboard into an SMO. This gap is particularly significant, as the unique structure of SMOs makes them more susceptible to certain challenges. As more organizations seek to fully or partially adopt self-organization, a deeper understanding of the individual learning required is crucial. A deeper understanding of this learning process will enable SMOs to better recruit, select, and support new members and empower individuals to better assess their likelihood of success within an SMO.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research was to study the learning required to onboard into a self-managed organization (SMO).

To understand this, the following research questions (RQ) were used.

RQ1: How did participants experience their onboarding?

RQ2: What unique challenges were present onboarding into self-management, and where within the organization did those challenges reside?

RQ3: What kind of learning was needed to help new members meet these onboarding challenges?

RQ4: What was supportive to new members learning as they onboarded?

Approach

This was a qualitative case study of 15 participants who joined an SMO within the past few years. Participants were drawn from different organizations to account for different experiences. In-depth interviews was the primary method of data collection, supported by a focus group and document analysis for triangulation. More details on the methodology is conveyed in Chapter 3.

Key Outcomes

This study sought to understand the learning required to onboard into a self-managed organization. Despite the wide range of different industries, geographies, and cultures represented within this sample, participants' experiences were surprisingly similar. It is hypothesized that this similarity was the result of common characteristics within SMOs. While not all these experiences were unique to self-managing environments, they were triggered, or exacerbated, by the particular nature of SMOs.

As presented in Chapter 4, the five key findings were:

KF1: Formal learning enabled a quick grounding in the basic mechanisms of self-management.

KF2: All participants faced challenges applying the principles and practices of self-management in practice.

KF3: All participants had to learn to shift their mindsets in order to successfully participate in self-management.

KF4: Transitioning into self-management was a nonlinear process that unfolded over time. For many participants it began years before they joined an SMO and continued even after their formal onboarding period was completed.

KF5: Formal training supported instrumental learning, while mindset shifts were more supported by informal learning.

These findings and the subsequent analysis listed in Chapter 5 led to four primary conclusions (see Chapter 6 for additional detail):

1. An organizational model cannot transcend the capabilities of its members.
2. A new relationship with self, others, and the organization required new ways of thinking and being.
3. Formal and informal learning experiences amidst a supportive social context enabled this holistic transformation.
4. Self-management is a team sport and is therefore likely only able to be learned with and through a group.

It is anticipated that these insights can enable SMOs to improve their recruitment and onboarding processes. In addition, they offer individuals a clearer understanding of the personal qualities, skills, and mindset needed for success in self-managing environments, empowering them to make informed decisions about their fit with an SMO.

Assumptions

This study was based upon the following assumptions:

- There is a shared experience of onboarding into self-management that differs from traditional onboarding, but is common across a diverse range of SMOs.
- Participants can accurately report on their experiences with onboarding into an SMO.
- Successful onboarding into an SMO requires learning.
- New members consciously pursue learning as part of their onboarding process and are conscious of what they learned, the strategies they used, and the factors that facilitated their learning.

Rationale and Significance

As the forces of humanity, technology, and complexity (Dignan, 2017) continue to place greater stress on organizations, it is expected that more will look toward self-management as a possible solution. Despite several books on the topic (Dignan, 2019a; Getz, 2009; Laloux, 2014; Slade, 2018), there is a dearth of robust research about it (Lee & Edmondson, 2017). Moreover, while many of the books mentioned above describe the processes of self-management, little attention is given to the *experience* of self-management and the particular learning it requires.

A deeper understanding of the internal development required of new members entering an SMO is beneficial in several ways. First, it validates the experience of those who struggle to adapt to working within an SMO. Second, it can help SMOs better support current members. Third, it can help those who are considering transitioning into self-management to better prepare. Fourth, it may assist recruitment by providing additional insight as to the skills and mindsets needed to be successful within self-management. Lastly, as noted by Lee and Edmondson (2017),

> Given that self-managing organizations represent an extreme case of the evolution towards less-hierarchical and more networked organizational designs, understanding the experiences of individuals in self-managing organizations may yield important insights about how people experience different workplace contexts. (p. 17)

Thus, a broad number of parties benefit from this research. They include members within self-managing organizations, people seeking to transition into self-managing organizations, mentors and consultants who seek to support people within self-managing organizations, and academics who are seeking to better understand them.

The Researcher

As a researcher, I bring a combination of personal and professional experience, as well as an academic lens, to this study of self-management. The son of a Soviet dissident, I have long been interested in questions of individual autonomy and systemic-control. After graduate school, I worked in educational reform and spent five years supporting innovative schools that were seeking to disrupt traditional industrial educational models.

I have since worked as a coach and business consultant, supporting teams and leaders seeking to actualize empowerment within the day-to-day running of their business. Since 2017, I have also worked as a partner at The Ready, a boutique organization design and transformation consultancy focused on helping organizations evolve their operating system toward self-managing principles. Over the past 13 years, my experience has spanned a diverse array of organizations, including small entrepreneurial startups and established Fortune 500 organizations.

In addition, at The Ready, we practice self-management. Thus, I have had the opportunity to be immersed in it as a participant over the past six years. This experience has helped inspire my inquiry, particularly as it demanded a lot of personal growth and development. Much of what I had read had focused on the benefits of self-management. I was caught off-guard by some of the challenges. What made it even more difficult was the sense of loneliness that these challenges engendered. *Was I the only one struggling? Did this mean I was not as competent as I thought? How could I support others, as they joined, based on my own learnings?* My experience transitioning into self-management was bumpy. It was only in sharing with others that I was able to learn that my experience was not unique. This sharing was most supportive to me and enabled me then coach other members as they joined. It is my hope that my research can make such learning available to others.

In addition to my personal and professional experience, I am also drawing from many concepts I have learned throughout my education. After high school, I completed five years of Talmudical seminary and Rabbinical school. This deep exploration of religious texts has helped inform my understanding of the human experience as a multifaceted composite of rational, irrational, and spiritual needs. After Rabbinical school, I received an M.A in Clinical Psychology, which informs my understanding of psychodynamic processes and the impact of the subconscious on human behavior. I returned to Columbia to deepen my understanding of organizations and leadership through the interdisciplinary study of Organizational Psychology and Adult Learning and Leadership. Both disciplines inform my understanding of my research topic, as Organizational Psychology has helped me analyze new members' experiences systemically, while Adult Learning has helped me understand their learning journeys.

Definitions

Self-managing organization (SMOs): Organizations that break free of the traditional management model to radically decentralized authority in a formal and systematic way

(Lee & Edmondson, 2017). In an SMO, individuals and teams have high levels of autonomy and are responsible for making their own decisions, setting their own goals, and organizing their own work. SMOs aim to create a more participatory work environment where everyone has a voice and contributes to the overall success of the organization.

Mindsets: The attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions that individuals hold about themselves, others, and the world around them. These mental frameworks shape how people interpret and respond to situations, and can influence their behavior and decision-making. As utilized within this study, the term incorporates Dweck's (2007) mindset, Mezirow's (1990) frame of reference, and Argyris's (1977) assumptions and governing variables.

Single-Loop Learning: Single-loop learning is a type of learning that involves making small adjustments within an existing mental framework, or set of rules, in order to improve performance or achieve a goal. It is a relatively simple and straightforward process of feedback and adjustment, where the focus is on correcting errors or inefficiencies in the current approach, without questioning the underlying assumptions or values (Argyris & Schon 1974, Argyris 1977).

Double-Loop Learning: Learning that results from individuals or organizations questioning their underlying assumptions, norms, and objectives. This reexamination is triggered in response to a mismatch between an anticipated outcome and the actual result (Argyris & Schon 1974, Argyris, 1977). In this study, the term also incorporates the transformation of one's frames of reference, described by Mezirow (1990, 2012) as Transformative Learning.

Instrumental Learning: Instrumental learning is focused on acquiring specific skills or knowledge that can be applied to achieve a specific goal or outcome. It is often associated with traditional education and training programs, where the focus is on developing technical competencies and expertise (Mezirow, 1990, 2012).

Felt Sense: A holistic experience that incorporates somatic, emotional, and subconscious elements that may not always be in full awareness but are always present (Dirkx, 2006; Nicolaides & Scully-Russ, 2018).

Social Learning*:* The process by which individuals acquire new knowledge, behaviors, and attitudes through observation and interaction with others. It includes learning from the experiences of others and from the broader social and cultural environment (Bandura, 1977; Scully-Russ & Boyle, 2018).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction and Overview

The purpose of this research was to study 15 members within their first few years at a self-managing organization to better understand the learning required to onboard into an SMO. Considering that an increasing number of organizations are seeking to fully or partially adopt self-organization, it was anticipated that a deeper understanding of members' onboarding experiences will inform SMOs recruitment and onboarding and broaden our understanding of the field.

The literature review examined current research around three topic areas that are most relevant to this inquiry: (1) the history, successes, and challenges of self-managing organizations; (2) relevant literature on onboarding and organizational socialization; and (3) the mindset shifts required for self-management and the learning needed to support them.

Several online databases were used throughout the literature review, including Google Scholar, JSTOR, APA PsychNET, and CLIO. As the academic literature on SMOs is still scarce, business books, newspapers, online magazines, blogs, and business review magazines were also used to ensure a thorough investigation of the topic.

To explore SMOs, academic research journals that were referenced include *Journal of Organization Design, Academy of Management Perspectives, Academy of Management Journal, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, Journal of Organizational Transformation & Social Change, American Psychologist, Organization Studies, Journal of Leadership Studies, Administrative Science Quarterly, The Leadership Quarterly, Journal of Organizational Design, Strategy & Leadership, Human Nature, Behavioral and Brain Sciences, Encyclopedia of Evolutionary Psychological Science, Current Directions in Psychological Science, Scandinavian*

Journal of Management, SSRN, Electronic Journal, and *Trends in Neurosciences.* Business review magazines that were used include *MIT Sloan Management Review* and *Harvard Business Review*. Newspapers and magazines that were used include *The New York Times, Time, Fast Company, Inc., Financial Times, Forbes,* and *Wired.*

To explore onboarding and organizational socialization, academic journals that were referenced include the *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *Journal of Applied Psychology, Journal of Work-Applied Management, International Journal of Training and Development, Research in Personnel and Human Resources Management,* and *The Academy of Management Review*. In addition, books such as *Toward a Theory of Organizational Socialization* (Van Maanen & Schein, 1977) were referenced.

To explore the learning needed to transform paradigms toward self-management, academic research journals that were referenced include *Journal of Transformative Education, International Journal of Leadership in Education, The Leadership Quarterly, Journal of Management Inquiry, Small Group Research, Strategic HR Review*, *Symposium*, and *Human Resource Development Review*. In addition, books such as *The Handbook of Transformative Learning* (Taylor & Cranton, 2012), *Brave New Work* (Dignan, 2019a), *Freedom, Inc*. (Carney & Getz, 2009), *Learning for Leadership* (Drago-Severson et al., 2013), *Contemporary Theories of Learning* (Illeris, 2018), *An Everyone Culture* (Kegan et al., 2016), *Reinventing Organizations* (Laloux, 2014), *Learning in Adulthood* (Merriam et al., 2007), *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood* (Mezirow, 1990), and *Transformative Learning in Practice* (Taylor, 2010) were also used.

Bibliographies from articles in these journals helped to identify additional articles on SMOs and the learning required for them. Keywords used to identify relevant materials on the history, benefits, and challenges of SMOs include “Self-managing organizations,” “Non-hierarchical Companies,” “Flat organizations,” “Bossless companies,” “Post-industrial organizations,” “Horizontal organizations,” “Holacracy,” “Teal,” and “Liberated Companies.” Keywords used to identify materials on onboarding and socialization include: “Organizational Onboarding,” “Organizational socialization,” “Onboarding and SMOs,” and “Socialization and double-loop learning.”

Keywords used to identify materials on the learning required for self-management include: “Transformative learning,” “Vertical Learning,” “Transformative learning for self-management,” Informal learning,” and “learning during transformation.”

Rationale for Topics

Three main topics are covered in this review. Topic 1 briefly reviews literature that charts the history of traditional management, the rise of non-hierarchical alternatives, the formation of SMOs, and their characteristics, impact, benefits, and challenges. Topic 1 covers the following areas: (1) the history of traditional management; (2) precursors to self-management; (3) non-hierarchical models; (4) Self-Managing Organizations (SMOs); (5) the number and impact of SMOs, benefits of SMOs, and hyperbolic claims made about SMOs; and (6) challenges within SMOs.

A review of the history, successes, and challenges of self-managing organizations is relevant for this study since to understand members’ experience transitioning into an SMO we must understand the broader context in which they are embedded (Lewin, 1951). This includes understanding the mechanisms and assumptions of traditional management, against whom SMOs are usually contrasted. Moreover, as this study focuses on the experience of transitioning to an

SMO, the contrasting approach of traditional organizations is important, as they formed the context from which participants transitioned.

Topic 2 reviews relevant literature on onboarding and organizational socialization and includes: (1) a general overview of onboarding; and (2) the SHRM onboarding model. An understanding of the relevant onboarding literature is important because it helps frame the nature of this transitional period. In addition, research on onboarding within traditional organizations provides a benchmark against which the experience of onboarding into SMOs can be compared and contrasted.

Topic 3 explores the mindset shifts required for self-management and how they may be learned. Topics 3 covers the following areas: (1) mindset required to succeed within an SMO; and (2) learning within an SMO. A review of the mindset shifts required for self-management and the learning needed to support them is relevant for this study as they directly relate to the research questions 3 and 4: “What kind of learning was needed to help new members meet these onboarding challenges?” and “What was supportive of new members’ learning as they onboarded?”

The chapter closes with a summary, followed by an overview of the Conceptual Framework that was developed for this study. The Conceptual Framework was informed by the above-mentioned literature reviewed in the following sections.

Topic 1: Self-Managing Organizations (SMOs)

SMOs lurk on the periphery of academic exploration. While some popular business books have explored them (Carney & Getz, 2009; Dignan 2019a; Laloux 2014; Slade 2018), the academic literature on SMOs is still nascent (Lee & Edmondson, 2017). However, this gap is important to fill, as SMOs continue to attract outsized interest in response to increased complexity and humanistic ideals (as explored in Chapter 1).

Moreover, while some of the systems, structures, and leadership approaches within SMOs have been documented, the reality of participants' lived experience is still mostly unknown (Haslett, 2019; Lee & Edmondson, 2017). What tensions do SMOs systematically solve? What new tensions are created? What is the experience of transitioning into this new paradigm? To understand SMOs and the members' experience within them, we first must explore the traditional managerial paradigm from which they seek to differentiate themselves.

History of Traditional Management

Currently, much of the world operates within the framework of an industrial model of management (Carney & Getz, 2009; Dignan, 2019a; Laloux, 2014; Robertson, 2015). From small nonprofits to large multinational corporations, most organizations operate based upon the same set of management principles and assumptions. Throughout organizations, people are organized in hierarchical structures. In these structures, power and authority are concentrated toward the top, with authority decreasing as one descends through the organizational chart. Decision-making and implementation are separated, with executives making decisions that are then implemented by the rest of the organization. Predicting and planning are prized, and individuals are measured against goals that are derived from the decisions of key leaders. Work is therefore laid out in linear fashion, broken into pieces, and parceled out.

This way of structuring businesses has become so common that some may assume it is the only way groups of people can be organized. Yet, although since ancient times command-and-control authoritarianism has often been the dominant form of governance (Laloux, 2014), it was only with the Industrial Revolution that it spread to the commercial realm. Until the

Industrial Revolution, commerce consisted mostly of agriculture, supported by a limited number of tradesmen. While politically controlled and repressed, tenant farmers and tradesmen had near full autonomy over their work. They decided when and how they planted, tended, and harvested their crops and were only accountable to hand over a percentage of the harvest to their lord. The same was true for tradesmen, who self-governed through guilds and, upon completing their apprenticeship, were fully empowered to employ their craft as they saw fit.

However, this changed with the Industrial Revolution. Individual, autonomous ways of working were not able to compete with the efficiency and output of mass production and were therefore discarded. This process was pioneered in Manchester, where many of the earliest implementations of the Industrial Revolution began. As Carney and Getz (2009) relate about one of the early industrialists,

> Wedgwood implemented a system of organization that, in 1776, Adam Smith dubbed the "division of labor." Every worker was trained "in detail" so that he was able to respond to the "growing demand for new shapes, glazes, and clays." Commodity articles were produced by workers, different from those producing ornamental items. Such was the extent of this scheme that in Wedgwood's Etruria plant ... all but five of the 278 workers had a specific assigned task. … Before, the peasant farmer would determine what was necessary to bring the harvest in and saw everything through to the end. The craftsman ... decided how they need to work to make the perfect product. Now, the simple act of following one task through to fruition was neither possible nor expected of the factory worker. (pp. 46-47)

This new way of working led to dramatic changes in the lives of workers and their families. For a significant part of the day, they were now forced to operate according to a preset process, to which they were expected to mold themselves. Moreover, now workers had to be specially trained and managed to ensure that their efforts seamlessly integrated into the overall process. This led to the rise of "supervisors," who were tasked with making sure all the workers performed as needed.

As the scope and scale of those needing to be supervised increased, a new layer of organizations formed—the bureaucracy. Comprising an army of middlemen, bureaucracies were the guardians of process and procedure, bridging the gap between the decision-makers at the top of the hierarchy and those who implemented at the bottom. Interestingly, at the time, many thought of bureaucracy as a more evolved form of management. While previously supervisors may have played favorites, indulged in nepotism, or varied in intelligence, the establishment of bureaucracy brought with it a codification and standardization of rules and processes. Weber argued in 1948,

> [P]recision, unity, strict subordination, reduction of friction and of material and personal costs—these are raised to the optimum point in the strictly bureaucratic administration, and especially in its monocratic form. As compared with all collegiate, honorific, and avocational forms of administration, trained bureaucracy is superior on all these points. (as quoted by Burton et al., 2017)

However, in their efforts to be impartial and consistent, bureaucracies also introduced uniformity, conformity, and rigidity. Context, extenuating circumstances, and relationships were no longer considered, and organizational inertia often blocked change (Carney & Getz, 2009; Dignan, 2019a; Hamel & Zanini, 2018).

The regimentation and control over individuals in the workplace continued to increase as the means of production developed. Increasingly sophisticated machinery demanded additional regimentation, and fierce competition between powerful industrialists motivated an intense race toward even greater efficiency. At the beginning of the 20th century, these forces all came to be personified by one unique individual—Frederick Winslow Taylor.

A trained engineer, Taylor sought to apply the scientific method to the process of production. While others had worked to improve the design of the machines they worked with, Taylor's innovation was to focus on the systems and procedures that informed how they were used. As recounted by McChrystal (2015), "Taylor became fascinated by the contrast between the scientific precision of the machines in the shop and the remarkably unscientific processes that connected the humans to these beautiful contraptions" (p. 38). He therefore began to apply the reductionist methods of classical mechanical engineering to work processes—breaking each down to its smallest element and then analyzing each part. As described further by McChrystal,

> Through a series of experiments, Taylor had determined the optimal temperature at which to cut steel chips, the optimal distance between the machinist and his tools, the optimal way for water to cool the lathe, and the optimal speed for internal conveyor belts. When it all came together, there was not a second of lost time, not an ounce of misplaced material, not a moment of unproductive human effort. (p. 37)

By optimizing the human process, Taylor was able to achieve stupendous results across many industries. As retold by Kanigel (2005), in his comprehensive biography,

> The cost to overhaul the boilers plummeted from sixty-two dollars—representing perhaps fifteen hundred dollars today—to eleven; machining a locomotive tire ... was now done in one fifth the time; Once it had taken ten hours to turn a particular canon projectile, now it took an hour and a half. Twelve hundred people worked ... but the figure would have been closer to two thousand were it not for Taylor. (pp, 207, 229)

These numbers astounded the industrial world, and they were quick to implement Taylor's approach. His philosophy of scientific management swiftly became gospel across many sectors, and its principles were applied with religious fervor. As described by historian Glenn Porter, "scientific management took on some of the trappings of a kind of secular religion; Taylor was the messiah, and his followers, who spread the word, were, (and still are) commonly referred to as 'disciples'" (as quoted by Kanigel, 2005, p. 412).

Scientific management led to significant improvements in production, which played a critical role in dramatically increasing the standard of living across the developed world. However, scientific management also significantly reinforced the hierarchical, top-down organizational structure. As outlined by McChrystal (2015), "This drew a hard-and-fast line between thought and action: managers did the thinking and planning, while workers executed" (p. 42). Taylor even told workers, "I have you for your strength and mechanical ability, and we have other men paid for thinking" (Kanigel, 2005, pp. 226-227). This way of thinking solidified management as a discipline (McChrystal, 2015) and continues to play a large role in defining how organizations are run until this day.

Precursors to Self-Management

While Taylorism continues to be the dominant model of management (Carney & Getz, 2009; Hamel, 2007; Laloux, 2014; Robertson, 2015), there has been a subset of leaders and theorists who have challenged some of the core principles of scientific management over the years. In the 1940s and 1950s, researchers from the Tavistock Institute in London discovered that coal miners who worked in self-managed teams had higher productivity and lower absenteeism rates than the more traditionally organized mines. These findings led to the development of a new theory of organization, labeled Socio-Technical Systems Design (STSD), which distributed organizational decision-making into autonomous self-managed teams (Tjepkema, 2003).

In the United States, too, there were examples of organizations and leaders that eschewed the traditional hierarchy. One such leader was William McKnight, who in the beginning of the 20th century (1914-1949) transformed 3M into a worldwide company with multiple well-known products, such as Scotch-tape and Post-its (*New York Times*, 1978). Known for the empowering culture he engendered at 3M, his philosophy continues to reverberate throughout the organization. It is perhaps best personified by one of McKnight's most repeated quotes:

> As our business grows, it becomes increasingly necessary to delegate responsibility and to encourage men and women to exercise their initiative. This requires considerable tolerance.... Mistakes will be made. But if a person is essentially right, the mistakes he or she makes are not as serious in the long run as the mistakes management will make if it undertakes to tell those in authority exactly how they must do their jobs. (as quoted by Garud et al., 2011, p. 749)

Another was Douglas McGregor (1960), whose classic work, *The Human Side of Enterprise,* critiqued the traditional management approach (Theory X) and argued in favor of a more empowering and humanistic approach (Theory Y). A more recent example is that of Herb Kelleher (1997) of Southwest Airlines, who shared,

> A financial analyst once asked me if I was afraid of losing control of our organization. I told him I've never had control and I never wanted it. If you create an environment where the people truly participate, you don't need control. They know what needs to be done, and they do it. And the more that people will devote themselves to your cause on a voluntary basis, a willing basis, the fewer hierarchs and control mechanisms you need. (p. 21)

Additional notable examples include Ricardo Semler (1995), owner of Semco; Rich Teerlink, CEO of Harley-Davidson (Teerlink & Ozley, 2000); Yvon Chouinard (2006), founder of Patagonia; and Dennis Bakke (2005), CEO of AES, each of whom published books cataloging how and why they broke free of the traditional managerial paradigm. In addition, international experiences in communal living and ownership, such as Kibbutzim in Israel (Banai, et al., 2000) and self-managing workers councils in Yugoslavia (Taylor et al., 1987), have provided alternate models for organizing human effort.

However, despite the fame and success of such non-traditional outliers, few Western organizations have sought to shift beyond the traditional management model. As described by Lee and Edmondson (2017), "The formal managerial hierarchy in modern organizations is as persistent as are calls for its replacement. The managerial hierarchy ... has proved remarkably resistant to change" (p. 2).

Thus, while challenges to the traditional, hierarchical forms of management have been raised for years, it is only recently that alternative forms of organizing have been gaining prominence. As discussed in Chapter 1, this is due in part to significant changes in the context organizations are operating in.

Non-Hierarchical Models

The changing context of the 21st century has inspired a host of new organizational models that seek to disrupt the traditional management structure (Carney & Getz, 2009; Dignan, 2019a; Laloux, 2014). They range from minor adjustments to the traditional hierarchy to a complete reimagining of all the essential elements of the organization.

Many different names have emerged to describe these different organizational models, reflecting the diversity of philosophies and structures they reflect. One term used has been "post-bureaucracy," defined by Grey and Garsten (2001) as a "trend encompassing a range of organizational changes which have as their espoused aim the erosion or dismantling of bureaucracy" (p. 230).

Another term that has been used is "bossless organizations. As described by Puranam (2014), bossless organizations are predicated upon the idea of "division of labor based on self-selection ... the overall goal of the organization is decomposed into sub-goals not by the decision of an authoritative superior, but rather emerges spontaneously through individuals recognizing valid sub-goals, and coalescing around them" (p. 14).

Additional terms include Beyond Budgeting companies (Hope & Fraser, 2003), Liberated companies (Carney & Getz, 2009), Responsive organizations (Responsive Org, 2014), Teal organizations (Laloux, 2014), Holacractic companies (Robertson, 2015), Horizontal organizations (Slade, 2018) and Evolutionary organizations (Dignan 2019a).

Self-managing Organizations (SMOs)

This burst of new names reflects the growing interest in non-traditional organizational models. However, as pointed out by Lee and Edmondson (2017), the diversity of micro, meso, and macro perspectives reflected by these different names makes integrating all this research difficult. Moreover, as Lee and Edmondson argue in their comprehensive literature review,

> existing literatures on less-hierarchical organizing fail to make a distinction between radical versus incremental efforts to organize less hierarchically (that is, those that seek change within the contours of the managerial hierarchy versus those that fundamentally depart from it). (p. 5)

Thus, they make the distinction between incremental efforts to adjust managerial hierarchy and radical shifts away from it. Lee and Edmondson define self-managing organizations (SMOs) as "those that radically decentralized authority in a formal and systematic way throughout the organization" (p. 5). At their essence, SMOs "eliminate the hierarchical reporting relationship between manager and subordinate that serves as the core building block of the managerial hierarchy and constitutes its key mechanism of control" (p. 5).

There are three key characteristics of SMOs as enumerated by Lee and Edmondson (2017). First, SMOs give individuals full "autonomy and authority," enabling them to execute work without oversight from a manager. Second, SMOs decentralize authority "throughout the entire organization" and not just within certain teams. Third, SMOs organize and systematize their processes and policies in a formal way.

Full Autonomy

By full autonomy, Lee and Edmondson (2017) mean that SMOs sever the hierarchical manager-subordinate relationship. In its stead, authority is redistributed within the organization. It is this shifting of power and authority that makes SMOs unique. Unlike self-managing teams, which often exist as islands within the management hierarchy, SMOs do away with the traditional power structure. Although there still is designing of tasks, monitoring of progress, and allocation of resources, within SMOs, authority is "formally distributed to individuals in a way that is not permanent, unbounded, or vested in hierarchical rank" (p. 12).

There are several ways in which this is done. One, is through democratic methods. For example, in Semco, they use voting and representation. Smaller decisions are made by a representative council, while for important decisions all employees get a direct vote (Semler, 1995). Another method is to collectively embed authority within dynamically held roles. Unlike jobs, which are static and often held for many years, roles are dynamic and evolving based upon the purpose they are seeking to support. The authority that is embedded in specific roles is therefore limited to what is needed to advance their purpose and open to adjustment if things seem out of balance (Robertson, 2015). This approach is most famously used by Zappos, which shifted to a role-based model in 2014, replacing all managers across the 15,000 person company with role-based teams (zapposinsights.com, 2019).

A third approach is to shift the power to a process or set of governing principles. This approach is advocated for by the Holacratic model of self-management, which uses a constitution as the core rule book for the organization. In doing so, it shifts the power and authority within the organization from the CEO to a document-bound legislative process (Robertson, 2015).

As a result of these approaches, SMOs invert the traditional approach to authority and empowerment within organizations. Within traditional organizations, authority rests with the leadership and is then doled out to various individuals based upon merit or seniority. However, within an SMO, the initial premise is that everyone is autonomous. This principle is wonderfully articulated in the *Valve Handbook for New Employees* (2012):

> This company is yours to steer—toward opportunities and away from risks. You have the power to green-light projects. You have the power to ship products. A flat structure removes every organizational barrier between your work and the customer enjoying that work.... There's no red tape stopping you from figuring out for yourself what our customers want, and then giving it to them. (p. 4)

This is not to say that SMOs don't place any constraints or guardrails to contain or direct decision making. Many SMOs do differentiate between different kinds of decisions and what is required to make them. These different kinds of decisions within an organization are referred to by Dignan (2019a) as the "decision stack," which can include:

1) Decisions which every member of the team can make as part of their basic member role.
2) Decisions which individual members of the team can make as part of their unique role mandates.
3) Decision which individual members can make after receiving advice from others impacted by it.
4) Decisions which must be consented to by the rest of the team.
5) Decision which must be agreed upon by all.

However, while they may curtail decision rights, there are two significant differences between the decision-making process of SMOs and that of traditional organizations. First, SMOs begin with the assumption that individuals are fully empowered and then decide specific instances in which that authority should be curtailed. At W. L. Gore, they call these instances "Below the waterline," as they may endanger the entire ship and thus should not be approached unilaterally (Gore, 2018). Second, and perhaps even more importantly, within SMOs the decision stack and associated processes apply to all. Unlike traditional organizations, where the rules often shift the further up the hierarchy one goes, within SMOs everyone is beholden to the same decision-making processes.

Organization-wide

Mutual responsibility to the same processes is the second key defining characteristic of SMOs. As defined by Lee and Edmondson (2017), "[Within SMOs] the formal rules apply for everyone in the organization, from front-line employees to mid- and senior-level employees"

(p. 15). This same sentiment was expressed by Bob Fishman, RHD's founder: "It struck me that even though I was the founder, the "boss" of this corporation, adhering to these [SMO] values meant that I wouldn't be able to impose a corporate directive—even when I was sure it was the right thing to do" (as quoted in Laloux, 2014, p. 244). This differentiate SMOs from the far more common Self-Managing Teams (SMTs), which are now found within 79% of Fortune 1000 companies (Watkins & Golembiewski, 2019). While SMTs may utilize many of the same processes as SMOs, their limited scope makes them a fundamentally different phenomenon. SMTs coexist within a traditional hierarchy; SMOs fundamentally dissolve it.

Formal System

The third and final characteristic of SMOs, as identified by Lee and Edmondson (2017), is that they have "a formal system that codifies how authority is decentralized in the organization through a set of explicit rules or principles" (p. 14). A formal system is important for several reasons. First, it reinforces that this new way of operating is greater than any single person or leader. Rather, it is now an independent system that can stand on its own, even if key people leave. Second, explicit documentation helps ensure consistency and alignment. This mitigates the challenge of people interpreting and applying key processes in different ways.

While all SMOs have a formal system that codifies how they decentralize authority, there are many ways in which that is expressed. Different SMOs have different approaches, highlighting the diversity of processes even within SMOs. Some SMOs, such Zappos and others using Holacracy, have a highly formalized system. Within the Holacracy, "core rules, structure, and processes of the 'operating system' for governing and managing an organization" (HolocracyOne, 2019, p. 1) are memorialized within the organizational constitution. Like a national constitution, this document serves as the guiding framework for all organizational decisions that ensue. Once ratified, it is then governed through a structured process in which changes, or amendments, are proposed and agreed upon.

Other SMOs have a less formal approach. Valve codified their values and ways of working with a playfully illustrated employee handbook. RHD has a 53-page document titled *Bill of Rights for Employees and Customers* (RHD, 2006). While all these organizations do it differently, what they have in common is that “rules for how authority is distributed in these new systems are made explicit in some way” (Lee & Edmondson, 2017, p. 14).

The Number and Impact of SMOs

The lack of research on SMOs makes it hard to gauge how many there are worldwide. While SMOs account for a very small percentage of current organizations, they do span across a wide range of industries, geographies, sizes, and lengths of operation. Although the exact number is unknown, there are directional data that can be used to roughly estimate the number of SMOs. As reported by Robertson (2018), over a thousand organizations utilize Holacracy, including Zappos. In Europe, Isaac Getz’s network of liberated organizations includes hundreds of companies (Clarke, 2018). Recent books, such as *Reinventing Organizations* (Laloux, 2015), *Freedom, Inc.* (Carney & Getz, 2009), and *Brave New Work* (Dignan, 2019a), profile dozens of diverse examples of self-management. Moreover, virtual communities such as Responsive.org, Reinventingorganizations.com, Tealforteal.com, Enliveningedge.org, and others host tens of thousands of members interested in learning about and practicing self-management.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, notable examples of companies practicing self-management include: FAVI (a French manufacturing company), AES (a publicly traded energy company with over 40,000 employees), Buurtzorg (a Dutch neighborhood nursing organization of over 8,000 nurses), W.L. Gore (a $3 billion high-tech company famous for its Gore-Tex® fabrics), Nucor

(America's most profitable steel maker), Svenska Handelsbanken (a Stockholm-based bank with more than 800 branches across Northern Europe and the UK), General Electric's Durham, North Carolina aviation plant, and the Vinci Group (a French concessions and construction company that employs almost 200,000 people) (Carney & Getz, 2009; Denning, 2018b; Hamel & Zanini, 2016; Laloux 2014).

Moreover, other companies are in the midst of transforming into SMOs or adopting many of their principles. For example, the French manufacturer Michelin announced a plan to "reorganize the whole group—more than 105,000 employees, at plants in 17 countries—along the same [decentralized and empowered] lines to become more agile and more responsive to customers" (Hill, 2017). Other organizations that share many of the same principles include communities like Linux and Wikipedia.

Thus, while they may only be a very small percentage of current organizations, SMOs have an outsized impact. Moreover, their increasingly elevated profile is sparking important conversations about the alternative ways to organize and structure organizations. This interest is reflected in the over 3,200 news articles featured on Google (as of February, 2023) on just the topic of the Holacracy model alone. In addition, many traditional organizations are already being influenced by SMO outliers. As Bernstein et al. (2016) note,

> A great deal of piecemeal adoption is already happening. Procter & Gamble ... has a vast open-innovation program, in which teams of people outside P&G's walls organize themselves to solve problems for the company. Google and 3M provide familiar examples as well. ("Finding The Right Amount" section, para. 2)

Benefits of SMOs

There are many benefits to organizing as a SMO. Some common themes that emerge across SMOs include greater empowerment, engagement, agility, innovation, and performance, each of which will be explored in greater detail below.

Empowerment

SMOs begin with the premise that all are empowered unless explicitly constrained. This has been described by Laloux (2014) as “reverse delegation. The expectation is that the frontline teams do everything, except for the things they choose to push upwards” (p. 79). This approach is predicated upon the fact that SMOs choose to treat all their employees like capable adults who can be trusted to make wise decisions. As expressed by Green at Morning Star, “Self-management is, at a very-very high level, exactly the way you live when you go home [where you make high stakes decisions such as whom to marry, whether to have children, or to select medical intervention]…We just ask you to keep that hat on when you come to work” (Gino & Staats, 2013, p. 4).

This approach is a fundamentally different way of thinking about people and their roles in organizations. By empowering employees to make wise decisions in service of the organization, SMOs engender a sense of ownership and proactiveness on the part of their workers. As described by Bakke (2005), who brought self-management to AES, this sense of responsibility extended to all functions in the organization:

> In Oklahoma, a driver on the fuel-handling team noticed that a machine used to manage the coal pile was nearly at the end of its useful life and in any event was an obsolete model. He volunteered to lead an effort to select the best replacement machine, negotiate the purchase, and finance the $350,000 cost through a local bank. All was done in consultation with colleagues ... but did not require their approval. (p. 80)

This example illustrates the nature of distributed leadership within SMOs. While there are not formal leadership positions, all are empowered to lead. As described by Carney and Getz (2009), this leadership is not imposed through position or authority. Rather, leaders emerge naturally as others choose to follow them. People abide by certain policies or strategies because they have actively chosen to do so, not because of any external threat or reward. This change is even reflected in the language many self-managing organizations use. For example, as told by Carney and Getz, "at Gore, associates have commitments instead of jobs ... a job is something a boss gives you.... A commitment is freely entered into, and is a promise of sorts made to those working alongside you" (p. 11). Authority within self-managing companies is often of this kind—self-imposed by members through informed judgment. As described by Carney and Getz, "a leader can't force people to emotionally own the company's vision; he can only seek to create the conditions—freedom of action—in which they are convinced of it themselves" (p. 69).

Engagement

The greater autonomy that SMOs offer is also correlated to better employee engagement. In an era when only 21% of employees are very engaged (Achievers, 2019) and only 34% are engaged (Harter, 2018), SMOs manage to buck the trend. As reported by Carney and Getz (2018), "Freedom-based companies, by contrast, can typically boast that more than 70% of their employees are 'engaged,' according to Gallup's data" (para. 12). One example of this trend is the healthcare SMO Buurtzorg, whose job satisfaction is the highest of any provider in Holland and has been named best employer of the year twice in a row, regardless of branch or sector (Nandram & Koster, 2014).

These data suggest that being empowered to make decisions and then held accountable for their results can be enormously engaging. As expressed by David Salvador, a team member responsible for maintenance within Michelin, "Before we had a top-down system: we applied the rules and that was that. Now there's an enormous energy" (as quoted in Hill, 2017, section 2).

Perhaps most astoundingly, the increased engagement reported at SMOs often includes many previously marginalized members. As told by Getz (2018),

> Here's a story I love from a leading European auto parts supplier FAVI in the 1980s. One late evening, Christine, was cleaning her Chief Executive's office when the phone rang. The cleaner picked it up. The caller apologized for not warning about the late arrival and said FAVI's CEO was due to pick him up. Since there was nobody around,

> Christine took the keys to one of the company cars, drove to the airport, and brought the visitor to his hotel. She then came back and finished her cleaning. She didn't tell anyone. She did what she believed is right. And it's great she did. The visitor was a quality auditor from Fiat, and he was so impressed that he raised FAVI's rating by 10%. (p. 3)

Agility

SMOs' unique structure also enables them to move quickly. This allows SMOs to operate with the speed and nimbleness of small start-ups despite their size or longevity. This agility is by design:

> Bill [Gore founder at Gore Tex] used to work at DuPont. When they wanted to work on a project at DuPont they would create a small-empowered team. Once it got larger they would go back to hierarchical way of organizing. It was this experience that inspired the thought "if this collaborative, non hierarchical, liberated structure worked for important projects that needed to be done quickly, why shouldn't a company work that way all the time?" So once Gore left DuPont and started his own company, he decided to do just that. (Carney & Getz, 200, p. 5)

Most SMOs achieve this through radically decentralizing their organization into a network of self-contained teams. For example, the Chinese conglomerate Haier "has divided itself into more than 4,000 microenterprises, or MEs, most of which have 10 to 15 employees" (Hamel & Zanini, 2018, Monolithic Businesses to Microenterprises section, para. 1). Functioning as autonomous empowered teams allows for quicker decision-making and a much leaner headquarters function. "Vinci's Energy Division for instance has some 75,000 workers in 50 countries.... Yet the Vinci head office is just 50 persons, and it hasn't grown ... even as the business itself has quadrupled in size" (Denning, 2018b, para. 6).

The autonomy fostered in SMOs can also enable quicker problem-solving. Unlike in traditional companies, where multiple approvals tend to slow things down, in SMOs people can act as soon as an issue is spotted. As described by Bakke (2005), "At a plant, a technician who discovered that the heat exchanger needed repairs was authorized to schedule an outage and order the necessary replacement parts. He [could] ... consult ... but the final decision was his" (p. 80).

Moreover, self-management also enables people to swiftly congregate to solve pressing problems or take advantage of opportunities. As illustrated by Gino et al. (2016) in their iconic HBR Morning Star case study,

> As tomatoes were unloaded at the processing facilities, the flumes might get plugged with tomatoes. When that happened, colleagues from all areas of the company would help. Jay Latronica, a colleague in Evaporation, described it: "Even people from the warehouse will stop what they're doing and come because they know it's going to affect them down the line if we don't get the tomatoes in the factory. It's the cruddiest job in the plant—it's nasty, stinky, but everyone does it. It's amazing. There will be 30 people shoveling, getting water all over them. They might be at the start of their shift and they know they'll stink the rest of the shift. But they're helping." (p. 7)

The swift pivoting they described is enabled by the fact that no approvals were necessary to pause other work. Rather, members were empowered to rely on their best judgment to do what would best serve the needs of the organization.

Innovation

SMOs' empowerment and agility help foster an environment that is rich in innovation (Kinneen et al., 2018). Rather than being the purview of a specific function or team, within SMOs everyone is focused on invocation and given the opportunity to act on their ideas. This was how Shahzasd Qaim went on to become one of the world's most successful developers of electric power. A few months into joining AES, he went to visit his family in Pakistan. While he was there, he saw an opportunity to expand into that market and decided to advocate for it when he returned to the United States. After getting advice from others, he decided to take 2½ years to develop what later became a $700 million dollar plan. As recounted by Bakke (2005), "Neither the idea to investigate the possibilities in Pakistan nor any of the important decisions that followed were made by senior executives or central planners, or by the finance department or even a central business-development unit at AES" (p. 83). Rather, it was the result of one man who was empowered to drive his vision forward.

The unique combination of empowerment and agility makes SMOs highly innovative. An additional example is W.L. Gore & Associates, described as "Pound for pound, the most innovative company in America" (Deutschman, 2004, para. 3), whose magic Deutschman said did not come from heavy investments in R&D, but "[sprang] from a culture where people feel free to pursue ideas on their own, communicate with one another, and collaborate out of self-motivation rather than a sense of duty" ("Leaders Are Talent Magnets" section, para 1). This theme was also echoed by Vinci's CEO Huillard (2017), who wrote,

> In a few years, Vinci has become the fifth largest airport management company in the world. I have no part whatsoever in this success….. These successes are the result of initiatives taken entirely by employees.... Today we manage 37 airport platforms where 135 million passengers use every year. This activity exists due to the motivation of one colleague. My sole merit was that I provided him with the conditions which helped him to demonstrate his enthusiasm. (p. 5)

Performance

The greater empowerment, engagement, agility, and innovation of SMOs also translate into impressive performance. This is true across industry, country, and size. While there has not yet been compressive research on SMO performance, anecdotally many SMOs report outsized results. Some examples include: W. L Gore, who have reported "'double-digit' revenue growth for the past couple of years'' (Deutschman, 2004); SOL, a Finnish services company whose profit margin was 8.7%, compared with an industry average of 3% to 4% (Carney & Getz, 2009); Buurtzorg, a healthcare company that has cut costs by €3000 and time with patients by 35%, while at the same time generating the highest satisfaction rates among patients in homecare (Johansen & van den Bosch, 2017); Valve, whose estimated revenue per employee was higher than that of Google, Amazon, or Microsoft (Puranam & Håkonsson, 2015); Morning Star, which has grown to become the largest tomato processor in the world without a single boss (Kirkpatrick, 2011); the Svenska Handelsbanken bank, which has surpassed its European competitors on virtually every performance indicator (e.g., return on equity, total shareholder return, earnings per share, cost-to-income ratio, and client satisfaction) since 1971 (de Waal, 2005); the steel company Nucor, whose 2014 net income per employee, $31,100, "was more than 10 times that of US Steel" (Hamel & Zanini, 2016, p. 5); Michelin, which increased its sales from €19.553 billion in 2014, to €22.208 billion and was ranked by Forbes as America's #1 Best Large Employer (Getz, 2019); and Haier, which has grown their core appliance business by 23% a year, increased revenue by 18% annually, and created more than $2 billion in market value from new ventures (Hamel & Zanini, 2018).

Breaking free of traditional hierarchy has also helped companies achieve accelerated growth. One such example is the American music streaming service, Spotify. Launched in 2008, Spotify was able to reach 60 million active users in 60 countries by 2015 (Pullen, 2015). As noted by Deloitte (2018), "Spotify attributes much of its success and rapid growth to its ability to apply agile concepts to its [post-industrial] organization design" (p. 9).

Moreover, by eliminating costly control processes and functions, SMOs are also able to drastically streamline their operations. These simplifications add up to significant savings in time and money. As recounted by Carney and Getz's (2009) description of Zorbist's efforts to transform FAVI, a French manufacturing company,

> One of his first epiphanies came with his encounter with Alfred and his gloves outside the FAVI store room [when he realized that the money saved from theft by locking the storeroom was dwarfed by the money lost due to lost productivity].... Zorbist applied it next to the coffee machine. He calculated that having only one machine for the whole plant made an average refueling trip last three to five minutes. This made the real cost to the company of a cup of coffee one hundred times more than FAVI's cost of supplying the coffee itself.... Zorbist found similar false economies throughout the plant. (pp. 103-105)

This experience is echoed by many other SMOs. Kenneth Iverson (1997), the legendary leader of the steel manufacturer Nucor, boasted, “Nucor is a Fortune 500 company with sales in excess of 3.6 billion, yet we have a total of just 22 people working at our corporate headquarters” (p. 5). These savings are so significant that Hamel and Zanini (2016) calculate that if all companies followed suit, the value to the US economy alone would surpass 3 trillion dollars.

These accounts reflect the individual and organizational benefits self-management offers. Despite their small number, SMOs’ outsized results are attracting significant attention, and many other traditional companies are now seeking to emulate them. For a more comprehensive review of SMOs and the principles and processes they use, see Carney and Getz (2009) and Laloux (2015).

Hyperbolic Claims Made about SMOs

Even before the first SMO was created, many advocated for them because of their political ideology or utopian vision (Ronay et al., 2012). They saw self-management as a path toward equity and harmony that is more in line with man’s basic nature. This sentiment is echoed by modern self-management advocates, such as Slade (2018), who argued, “Non-hierarchical ways are the modus operandi of human beings” (p. 7).

Furthermore, as the rate of human progress continues to increase, many have come to believe that we are now on the cusp of a fundamentally new era, free of hierarchical control or imposition. As recounted by McSweeney (2006),

> Since the early 1980s, a growing literature in a range of management sub-disciplines has asserted that the age of bureaucracy has ended or is ending. It is said that there has been a “paradigm shift”; a “fundamental transformation”; “a profound shift”; “a startling evolution”; a “profound break”—that we live in a new organizational “age,” “era” or “epoch.” (p. 22)

This view is bolstered by the sense that the current organizational model is no longer sustainable. This is reflected in the ResponsiveOrg manifesto, which states, “The tension between organizations optimized for predictability and the unpredictable world they inhabit has reached a breaking point" (Responsive, 2014, para. 3). This view is also reinforced by a changing view of human relationships, characterized by Pfeffer (2013) as believing "that the world described by Machiavelli (1532/1998) is over—we are now all living in some postmodernist, egalitarian, paradise" (p. 270).

These perspectives often lead to self-management being portrayed as a panacea for all work related challenges. This seems to be the sentiment intimated by Laloux's (2015) opening paragraph, which states,

> Can we create organizations free of the pathologies that show up all too often in the workplace? Free of politics, bureaucracy, and infighting; free of stress and burnout; free of resignation, resentment, and apathy; free of posturing at the top and drudgery at the bottom? (p. 13)

This is also the view often expounded by self-management advocates, whose claims can at times seem messianic. In the words of Lee and Edmondson (2017), "Much practitioner rhetoric related to flattening hierarchies can be hyperbolic, promising occupational nirvana" (p. 17). Moreover, as noted by Elman (2018), much of the popular literature on self-management claims "more or less universal implications for their concepts" (p. 18).

Furthermore, as reminded by Leavitt (2003), "Academics, consultants, and management gurus regularly forecast their [hierarchies] imminent replacement by new, egalitarian structures" (para. 1). Examples include article titles such as "Is the Era of Management Over?" (Chakhoyan, 2017), "Firm of the Future: Managers and the End of Hierarchy" (Bain.com, 2017), and "The End of Management" (Murray, 2010).

Challenges within SMOs

However, as cautioned by Lee and Edmondson (2017), "the reality of self-management is more complicated than the rhetoric" (p. 17). They found that while some research found that self-managed teams improve employee engagement and satisfaction, other research showed they can lead to stress and burnout. This was expounded upon by Lee and Green (2022), who found that while decentralization was positive for high-performing workers, it degraded the experience of low-performing workers. This led them to argue "that not all employees are suited or ready to work in decentralized structures'' (p. 31). Olsson and Bosch (2018) identified several organizational challenges with self-management and declared that "empowerment is no 'silver bullet'" (p. 21). This sentiment is echoed by Burton et al. (2017), who claimed people are a "little too quick to jump on the bandwagon when we see a supposedly new and novel form and say 'Hey, this is awesome and solves all sorts of problems so it should be used everywhere'" ("Epilogue" section, para. 1). This caution is especially important for researchers, who, as argued by Pfeffer (2013), "need to be careful to distinguish the normative from the descriptive and our hopes and dreams from the reality of the world as it is" (p. 271).

The reality is that SMOs still only comprise a miniscule percentage of organizations worldwide. Despite numerous attempts to reform them, traditional hierarchal structures seem to persist throughout time (Leavitt, 2003). As catalogued by Burton et al. (2017), "Moses took his thousands to hundreds on down to tens; the Roman Army had its centurions which were aggregated up to legions; the Roman Catholic Church is hierarchical and is long lived" ("Is Hierarchy Necessary?" section, para. 2). This has led to the claim that "hierarchy appears to be a universal default for human social organization" (Ronay et al., 2012, p. 669). Moreover, as argued by Magee and Galinsky (2008), "the pervasiveness of hierarchy suggests that it serves important social and organizational functions" (p. 8). In fact, Prigozhin noted (as quoted in Pfeffer, 2013), "hierarchy is a fundamental structural principle of all organizational systems, including biological, technical, and social systems—including social systems consisting of nonhuman organisms" (p. 272). This sentiment is echoed by Leavitt (2003), who argues, "It is a phenomenon intrinsic to the complexity of the natural world" ("A Benevolent Tyranny" section, para. 1).

In addition to explaining the longevity of hierarchical systems, these arguments also highlight some of the struggles faced by new members of SMOs. Without the support of traditional hierarchical functions, they must shoulder the burden of meeting all those needs on their own. The challenges this raises can be categorized as psychological, biological, developmental, cognitive, social, and organizational, each of which will be explored below.

Psychological Challenges within SMOs

Pfeffer (2013) argues that hierarchy offers both practical and psychological value. This includes "fulfilling deep-seated needs for order and security" (p. 272), stability (Magee & Galinsky, 2008), structure (Friesen et al., 2014), measures of success (Leavitt, 2003), and identity (Leavitt, 2003). These needs are deeply embedded in the human psyche. Among the factors that contribute to the "emergence and endurance of informal and formal hierarchies are fundamental drives (for survival, for power, for self-enhancement) and psychological processes (the desire to be with high status members and post-hoc rationalizations that attribute positive traits to those in power)" (Lee & Edmondson, 2017, p. 18). Thus, while hierarchies can be enslaving, they also help fulfill deeply embedded human needs.

Moreover, while people often claim to desire autonomy, their actual behavior often proves otherwise. This is especially true for task-related activities, where "individuals prefer to coordinate with each other when one individual is dominant and the other is submissive. Dominance and submissiveness are complementary, in that dominant behavior reciprocated by submissive behavior facilitates social coordination" (Magee & Galinsky, 2008, p. 11).

This has led researchers Friesen et al. (2014) to conclude that the structuredness of hierarchies "may give them a type of psychological advantage over more equal forms of social organization, especially in circumstances when people lack personal control and needs for external structure are therefore especially salient" (p. 591). They explain this effect with Compensatory Control Theory (CCT), which proposes that "when personal control is undermined, people compensate by imposing structure on their external contexts," even if this external structure is "seemingly negative to more positive but less structured options" (p. 592). This was substantiated by their research, which found that "low-status groups may support hierarchies not because of imposed ideologies or the threat of force but because the social structure offered by hierarchies compensates for situations of low personal control" (p. 603). This finding was also supported by Landu et al. (2015), who found that "structure affirmation is a psychologically distinct means of compensating for reduced control" (p. 718).

These phenomena may be further reinforced by the context in which modern organizations operate. While a more complex environment can prompt more agility and empowerment (as explored in Chapter 1), it can also create more ambiguity and chaos. This lessens the control ordinary people feel over their lives and thus, as postulated by CCT, may paradoxically make them more desirous of external control.

Moreover, too much choice can be also experienced as dangerous. As described by psychologist Barry Schwartz (2000),

> [A]ll this freedom from constraint, to all this emphasis on individuals as the makers of their own worlds, their own destinies. It leaves people indecisive about what to do and why. Freedom of choice is a two-edged sword, for just on the other side of liberation sits chaos and paralysis. Thus, there is a price for freedom—danger. There is a price for enlightenment—uncertainty. There is a price for being able to change the rules of softball. You may not know what the new rules should be, and playing by new rules may damage what was good when you played by the old ones. Thus, in aspiring as a culture to

> offer individuals self-determination without constraint, we are not doing those individuals a favor. (p. 87)

Therefore, it is not surprising that some research suggests that even "lower-ranked individuals often demonstrate significant support for hierarchies" (Friesen et al., 2014, p. 591) and that a "substantial proportion of individuals opt for middle or lower rank" (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 1086). For some, the additional stress of full autonomy may be too high a price, and they are willing to trade some of their freedom for stability and safety. This echoes research on followership, which found that many people prefer not to be leaders. "These folks believed that being a strong #2 often allowed for greater contributions than being in the #1" (Kelley, 2008, p. 6).

This view is also expressed by political theorists, such as Rosenberg, (2020a), who argues,

> The vast majority of citizens do not have the cognitive capacity or emotional wherewithal to act as reflective, critical subjects or self-directing actors. Instead they are prone to thoughtlessness, insecurity and fear in a way that makes them dependent on external direction. (p. 47)

This dependency is both stoked and supported by traditional hierarchical organizations. For those transitioning into SMOs, it can be forced into the harsh light of day for the first time. Thus, being in an SMO can therefore be both more empowering *and* more stressful. The danger that Schwartz (2000) describes as the shadow side of freedom can take a psychological toll and cost valuable time and energy to manage. As described by Widrich (2015), "the way I would describe it is that the amount of freedom people had, with absolutely no guidance, expectations, or accountability, was pretty overwhelming" (para. 5). This has been echoed by critics of self-management, as noted by McKenna et al. (2010), who point out that it "can be a stressful experience for employees, since it weakens job security, intensifies time pressures and places greater responsibility on employees to manage their work lives and careers" (p. 130). This was the experience of Zoll (2018), who reflected, “Most of us worked too much. Holacracy felt like an extra job to take care of for me personally. At some point, it felt more like a burden than an empowering system” (para. 7). These observations mirror research from self-managing teams that found that the increased responsibility and peer-pressure from other members lead employees to feel more stress in the team environment than under the old bureaucratic systems. In fact, paradoxically, the coercive control generated by peers within self-managing teams ended up being more controlling than the bureaucratic system it sought to replace (Barker, 1993).

All these factors suggest that the greater autonomy SMOs provide can also create increased psychological pressure. This is also reflected in Haslett’s (2019) research on the impact of self-management on wellbeing. He notes, “Employees experience a dichotomous relationship from having greater responsibility; for some, it engenders empowerment, giving employees a greater sense of ownership, for others, it may result in feeling overloaded and stressed” (p. 24). This was also mirrored by Ryhänen (2020), who stated, “Extensive autonomy might leave employees feeling alone and blurring the line between work and leisure, thus heightening the risk of burnout” (p .79), and Harjanne (2021), who found that self-management creates “more pressure to the individual” (p. 58). While the extent and ramifications of the psychological pressures within an SMO are still not fully known, they do help explain why some struggle to adapt to self-management.

Biological and Evolutionary Roots of Hierarchy

In addition to serving deeply embedded psychological needs, hierarchy also seems hardwired into human physiology and evolutionary history. This is reflected in the fact that many primary human systems are impacted by hierarchical factors. One such system is the serotonergic system. As outlined by Ziomkiewicz-Wichary (2016),

> Neurophysiological studies conducted in nonhuman primates and in humans suggest an important role of serotoninergic system in shaping dominance hierarchy. Results of these studies demonstrate serotonin involvement in mechanism of achieving and maintaining dominant rank in social hierarchy. (p. 3)

Members with high-status positions showed higher levels of blood and brain serotonin (5-HT), which decreased when those positions were lost. Moreover, induced rises in 5-HT levels promoted dominance acquisition in both humans and animals (Ziomkiewicz-Wichary, 2016). Another biological factor that is impacted and impacts hierarchy is the steroid testosterone:

> One study found, for example, that individuals with high basal testosterone perform better when placed in a high-ranked organizational position, but worse in a low-ranked position (Josephs et al., 2006). The reverse is true for individuals with low basal testosterone. (Van Vugt, 2017, p. 10)

While Meij et al. (2016) found that among "managers, there was no significant relationship between testosterone and leadership styles" (p. 78), they did find that higher basal testosterone accounted for more dominant behaviors by non-managers. Moreover, testosterone/role matches within organizations seem to predict greater productivity. As reported by Ronay et al. (2012), "mixed-testosterone groups achieved greater productivity than did groups comprising all high-testosterone or all low-testosterone individuals" (p. 669).

In addition, recent neuroimaging studies (Wang et al., 2014) have revealed "[a] distinct network of cortical brain regions involved in social status recognition" (p. 676), most importantly the prefrontal cortex (PFC) that has been found to respond differently based upon hierarchical factors. Furthermore there may also be genetic factors correlated with leadership (Van Vugt & Ronay, 2014).

These factors suggest that while there is certainly a cultural component to hierarchy, it is also a reflection of human biology. In fact, dominance hierarchies pre-date many other aspects of evolution, leading some (Peterson, 2018) to suggest that "dominance hierarchies are older than trees" (p. 14). Van Vugt and Ronay (2014) also remind us that "dominance is still part of our ancient primate heritage and there is plenty of evidence from traditional and modern societies that leaders will coerce followers if they believe they can get away with it" ("Psychological Adaptations For Dominance" section, para. 6).

Moreover, as proposed by Evolutionary Leadership Theory (ELT) (Van Vugt & Ahuja, 2011), the way we approach leadership today is still influenced by our evolutionary past. Some of these implicit assumptions include leader selection based on physical prowess, imposing physique, height, and gender (Van Vugt & Ronay, 2014). This is also reflected in the fact that social hierarchies are quick to form in leaderless groups and that they are influenced by factors, such as waist-to-hip ratio, that correlate to physical health (Campbell et al., 2002). These examples illustrate how the modern brain is still subconsciously projecting its ancient needs upon current reality (Van Vugt, 2017). Despite the fact that corporate leaders do not have to do physical battle today, there are still selection biases that favor those who could.

Thus, while SMOs may solve many challenges in the current environment, to understand members' experiences, we must transpose an SMO structure onto a more primal and brutish time. Although ancient hunter gatherers did seem to eschew formal hierarchy, they did find the need for leadership to solve recurrent problems, including coordination, conflict resolution, punishment, intergroup relations, and hunting and food sharing. This leadership was "informal and based on charisma and personalized influence" (Van Vugt & Ronay 2014, "The Evolutionary Psychology of Leadership" section, para 4). Furthermore, this leadership also provided safety and security to those who chose to be followers. In their review, Bastardoz and Van Vugt (2019) note that "humans have an adaptive followership psychology deeply rooted in our ancestral past" (p. 89). Of the many reasons they list for a fellowship preference, two have particular relevance to the study of SMOs. First, leadership carries higher risk and opportunity for conflict (Bastardoz & Van Vugt, 2019). Second, as performance can lag if too many people vie for leadership, followership can be more advantageous to the group as a whole (Bastardoz & Van Vugt, 2019). These reasons continue to ring true today and can help explain why some struggle in SMOs. This was also substantiated by initial research (Nissi, 2021), which found that "not everyone [within an SMO] enjoyed having the leadership positions."

The impact of placing humans, who have evolved to thrive under some form of leadership, into non-hierarchical systems like SMOs is still not understood. Do implicit hierarchies form to take the place of the explicit ones? Is additional stress generated as people adapt? Do some feel more strain than others as suggested by Nissi (2021)? These questions may inform what new members within an SMO must grapple with.

Cognitive and Developmental Challenges within SMOs

Transitioning into SMOs also carries significant cognitive demands:

> More autonomy means more responsibility. Shifting from a narrow role where each guideline and to do tasks are translated to the one where one has the freedom to experience and contributes with his/her own talents, experience and expertise is also a challenging task, as it was altogether a different mindset. (Kinneen & Younas, 2018, p. 34)

Moreover, it is not enough simply to learn new processes. Self-management requires people to work at a developmentally different level. As Rosenberg argues (2020b),

> To effectively self-direct, the individual must have the cognitive capacities for integration and abstraction. They must be able to observe the particulars of a situation including their position in it and relate them to one another and to a larger context in which they may be embedded. (p. 9)

The developmental challenges of self-management were also noted by Lee and Edmondson (2017). They quote the developmentalist Robert Kegan, who argued "that self-managing requires a stage of mental complexity that has the capacity to hold multiple concepts of power and authority simultaneously" (Kegan, 1998, p. 157, as quoted in Lee & Edmondson, 2017), as well as the ability to distinguish between them.

This sentiment is built upon by Haslett (2019), who draws upon Kegan's work to argue that most would be challenged by self-management "because they have not yet learnt to acknowledge accountability for their decision making, and their need for external validation would indicatively challenge their ability to work autonomously" (p. 42). Kegan chartered several stages of development to describe how people make sense of the world around them. As explained by Drago-Severson et al. (2013), these stages are based upon several key principles. The first is constructivism, or the idea that humans are actively interpreting and "constructing" every minute of their lives. The second is developmentalism, or the idea that the way in which people construct meaning can grow more complex throughout their life. And the third principle is that a critical component of being able to make meaning is how we balance the things we can take "perspective on and control" (i.e., hold as "object") and what we are too closely identified with, and thus cannot see (i.e., are "subject to").

The three principles intersect to form a developmental continuum in which one constructs meaning in a more complex, nuanced, and object[ive] way as one progresses. Drago-Severson et al. (2013) simplify Kegan's original model to focus on three of the most common ways of knowing. The first they term *instrumental,* in which the orientation is toward the concrete and fixed. "Instrumental knowers orient toward rule following and feel supported when others provide specific, explicit advice" (p. 63). The second they term *socializing,* in which the orientation is more developed, allowing for abstract thinking and reflection. However, in this stage, people are "other-focused, and they often subordinate their own needs to those of others ... they are not yet able to have perspective on their relationships. They feel responsible for others' feelings and hold other people responsible for their feelings" (p. 64). The third they term *self-authoring*:

> the capacity to take perspective on their interpersonal relationships and society's expectations ... meaning that they can look at them, manage them, evaluate them, prioritize them, reflect on them, and regulate them. Accordingly, we refer to self-authoring knowers as having a "reflective self." Moreover, they have the capacity to generate their own value system, standards, and personal philosophy, and they take responsibility for and ownership of their own internal authority. They can identify abstract values, principles, and longer-term purposes and are able to prioritize and integrate competing values. Self-authoring knowers can assess other people's expectations and judgments of them and compare these with their own. (p. 66)

Drago-Severson et al.'s description of self-authoring echoes many of the requirements SMOs place upon their members. While self-authoring has not been "found to be associated with gender, age, or life phase" (p. 57), it is not the norm. As summarized by Kegan et al. (2016), "We expect most workers to be self-authorizing but most are not" (p. 77).

Thus, for many prospective SMO members, the skills required to be successful may lie beyond their current level of development. Furthermore, to successfully transition into an SMO, members must often unlearn many assumptions about power, leadership, and their role within the organization. It is not enough to empower individuals by changing the organizational structure, or adopting a new set of bylaws. For self-management to be effective, members must actually take up the power that is being offered to them. This was the case at Zappos, where many struggled to actualize their newfound freedom. As recounted by Alexis Gonzales-Black (Robinpzander.com, 2017), who co-led the rollout of Holacracy at Zappos,

> We [realized we] have given everyone permission, we have given everyone authority, we have given everyone this huge tool, but people aren't using it. What we realized in that moment is that there is a huge process of unlearning the habits we have learned ... [we] created a lot of new materials to help people build the muscle of being a self advocate ... because at first no one wanted to use it. (13:43-14:20)

Helping people "build the muscles of self-management" is especially challenging, as old notions of power are deeply embedded. Magee and Galinsky (2008) cite that "the concept of power is embedded within individuals" (p. 10). To unlearn it, members must surface and challenge many implicit assumptions they hold. This examination of one's assumptions and mental models has been described by Argyris & Schon (1974) as double-loop learning, as it goes beyond trying to solve a particular problem (single-loop). While powerful, double-loop learning is difficult, as it forces one to confront many of their own fears and inadequacies and often triggers strong defensive routines (Argyris, 1991). If this deeper learning and challenging of assumptions and biases does not take place, members just layer their old defensive habits on top of the new SMO processes. As one Morning Star employee noted, "Maybe 10% of folks hold others accountable and will say, 'Here is your mission, are you doing it?' Instead, too often, 'I am going to use the principles' is a threat that someone will start a separation process against someone else, not a means to improve the organization" (Gino et al., 2016, p. 11).

All these cognitive and developmental challenges lead some to argue that SMOs are not for everyone (Haslett, 2019). As a longtime employee at Morning Star noted, "I don't believe that everyone can be self-managed. The issue is that many people don't realize this. When you tell someone that he/she can't be a self-starter, it isn't an insult, it is an attribute" (as quoted by Gino et al., 2016, p. 4). This point is echoed by Shaer (2013), who argues, "Horizontally managed companies work in large part because they tend to attract people who are okay working in a bossless environment and weed out the ones who aren't" (para. 50).

For those who are not ready for all these new cognitive and developmental challenges, well-meaning efforts to spread self-management can be experienced as "violence" (Blumenthal, 2019, personal correspondence). This sentiment is echoed by Caddel (2016), who critiques Holacracy by writing,

> The distance between the theoretical conversation and the reality of work is just too far. The average employee is already overworked and undertrained; asking them to learn

> the management equivalent of Dungeons and Dragons on top of their workload is foolish, if not inhumane. (as quoted in Appelo, 2016, para. 9)

Moreover, as suggested by Lee (2019), human capital factors such as motivation, interest, and prior performance all impact whether decentralization will be helpful or harmful. For those who are not ready, "decentralized structures can do harm as well as good" (p. 149).

Social Challenges within SMOs

The psychological, physiological, and developmental factors mentioned above may help explain some of the common social challenges that have been found to emerge in some SMOs. As noted by Mont (2017),

> New organizational structure can create new possibilities for the ways we relate to each other, but internalized ways of thinking and being can cause us to fall back into old patterns without even realizing it. This gives rise to an invisible structure of exclusion and inequity despite any visible structure of empowerment that may have been put in place. (para. 14)

In many SMOs, peer assessment can also lead to social pressure to conform to social norms within the firm (Foss & Dobrajska, 2015). It can also unfairly reward more popular or charismatic employees. This has been one of the criticisms of W.L. Gore, whose Glassdoor (2019d) page profiled 18 employee reviews that claimed, "The ranking system [At W.L. Gore] is a popularity contest in many ways."

Moreover, while SMOs explicitly remove management hierarchies, implicit hierarchies do often emerge. Diefenbach and Sillince (2011) point out, "Network [flat] organizations are more vulnerable to the emergence of informal hierarchy than other organizations" (p. 1529). As there are fewer formal structures and policies in place, flat organizations can be more prone to implicit hierarchy. This is because the organizational culture is even more influenced by actions of its members, which are prone to bias. This was the case in a "network" company studied by Oberg and Walgenbach (2008), where an examination of their communication patterns revealed that, despite their best efforts to abolish hierarchy through many different means, including using the same size offices and equipment, informal language, lack of an org chart, etc., a strong informal hierarchy still emerged.

Natural differences in personality and disposition also create hierarchy:

> Crucially, it may not be individual or collective malpractices or unethical behavior but simply differences in communication per se which lead to communicative dominance and, as a consequence, to informal hierarchical structures and processes. And not only concerning communication but also concerning decision-making processes and resource allocation. In this sense, the formal principle of autopoiesis might speak strongly against formal hierarchy–but it is no guarantee against the emergence of informal hierarchy; on the contrary, it seems to lay the ground for the informal principle of communicative dominance to take over. (Diefenbach & Sillince, 2011, p. 1529)

Moreover, research by Oedzes et al. (2018) found that strong informal hierarchies are most likely to surface when there is a complex task and ambiguous context—often precisely the environment in which many SMOs operate. Thus, “paradoxically ... by reducing the strength of the formal hierarchy in groups that work on complex tasks, organizations may unintentionally replace one type of hierarchical differentiation (i.e., formal) with another type (i.e., informal)” (p. 321).

When unmanaged, this informal hierarchy can undercut the autonomy and empowerment that SMOs provide and serve to fuel resentment and conflict. This was one of the arguments made by Jeri Ellsworth (Warr, 2013), a former employee at Valve, who described it as:

> [a] pseudo-flat structure where, at least in small groups, you’re all peers and make decisions together. But the one thing I found out the hard way is that there is actually a hidden layer of powerful management structure in the company and it felt a lot like high school. There are popular kids that have acquired power in the company, then there’s the trouble makers, and everyone in between. (para. 4)

This “hidden layer” of management can lead to favoritism, lack of transparency, inequality, and siloing. To succeed, members spent time cozying up to those with power and influence:

> To succeed at Valve you need to belong to the group that has more decisional power and, even when you succeed temporarily, be certain that you have an expiration date. No matter how hard you work, no matter how original and productive you are, if your bosses

> and the people who count don't like you, you will be fired soon or you will be managed out. (Spicer, 2018, para. 6)

This pattern has also been reported at Zappos. As described by one Glassdoor (2019b) review, there was "no real room for progression and advancement [at Zappos] unless you were friends with the people with power to get you into certain roles."

Another social challenge that seems common in SMOs is their difficulty to quickly and successfully manage conflict. This mirrors research on Self-Managing Teams that found that their very structure contributed to increased conflict. As described by Langfred (2007),

> Self-managing teams are not always good at "managing" themselves. DeLeon (2001) observed the reluctance of members of self-managing teams to properly deal with emerging conflict, and Vardi and Weitz (2004) noted that their autonomy and freedom give self- managing teams greater potential for misbehavior and conflict. (p. 895)

In traditional hierarchies, higher ranking members can mediate conflict. However, the lack of clear positional authority within SMOs means that there is no single person who can "make the call." Although in theory SMOs mitigate this challenge with conflict management processes (Laloux, 2014), in practice it can be a struggle. Moreover, the autonomy self-management provides may at times fuel conflict. As argued by Baarle et al. (2019), "empowerment initiatives may give rise to tensions within actors and tensions between actors. These two types of tensions manifest themselves simultaneously and tend to reinforce each other—ultimately undermining the empowerment effort" ("Discussion" section, para. 1).

In addition, by their very nature, implicit hierarchies are informal and thus often unacknowledged (Baker, 2015). This makes them harder to manage and increases the likelihood of dysfunction, bias, and abuse. This seems to be the case at Valve, where one Glassdoor (2019c) employee review reported, "The place is run like a school yard without adult supervision. Bullies and loud people get the attention and rewards." Moreover, not knowing who holds implicit power can further undermine trust. Byrd (2018) described the hidden hierarchies as "basically serv[ing] as the KGB of the company. They're very powerful, but you're never quite sure who they are or what they are capable of. As such, it's almost impossible to know who to actually trust" (para. 5). Ironically, in their effort to abolish disempowering hierarchies, some SMOs seem to have engendered a more corrosive environment. Rather than enabling more creativity and autonomy, the lack of safety and clarity in these cultures leads to defensive behaviors such as "code defensively, never reveal vulnerable personal information about yourself to coworkers, never ask for help unless it's absolutely necessary, and to seek the patronage of a powerful baron" (Jin, 2018, para. 21). Moreover, all the energy and time spent navigating these complex social dynamics is energy and time not spent toward the organizational purpose or professional development. These patterns were also identified by Harjanne (2021), who found, when interviewing former members of an SMO, that their biggest tension was around the distribution of power.

Organizational Challenges within SMOs

There are a series of organizational challenges that seem to be common to SMOs. While many of these challenges are not unique to SMOs, they do seem to be exacerbated or enabled by their operating model. As noted by Klein and Foss (2014), "there are conditions where managerial authority is critical: when there is urgency to the decision making; when decisive knowledge is concentrated in the top management team; and when there needs to be tight interdependence between multiple decisions" (p. 76). Without managerial authority, SMOs can struggle in each of these domains. This was supported by Olsson and Bosch (2018), who found that SMOs struggle with strategic issues such as chaos, local optimization at the expense of real value, and proper investment.

Making decisions quickly can be challenging when more are involved. While many SMOs utilize group processes to make decisions (Dignan, 2019a; Laloux, 2016; Slade, 2018), this can take time. Although Kummelstedt (2022) found that decision-making happened effectively, slow decision-making was one of the challenges Ryhänen (2020) identified with self-management. W. L. Gore. too. seemed to struggle with this, as argued by a criticism on a Glassdoor (2019d) page: "[W.L Gore] needs to find a happy medium between lattice structure and top-down leadership to optimize speed of decision-making." This can be especially true for personnel decisions, which, considering the tight-knit environment of many SMOs, can be particularly difficult. As described by an employee of Menlo Innovations, a small SMO based in Michigan, "Dealing with problem employees can be rather hairy. Letting someone go can be a long process and as far as I've seen is rarely done" (Glassdoor, 2019a).

Close coordination and accountability among teams can also be challenging in SMOs. As described by Groen (2018), this was one of the challenges facing Viisi, a financial consulting firm utilizing Holacracy, "Because circles are autonomous and expected to be capable enough to solve issues within the circle, what will happen if this is not the case and a circle will structurally underperform?" (p. 67).

Another commonly faced organizational challenge within SMOs is a lack of clarity and shared direction. As noted by one W.L. Gore Glassdoor (2019d) review, "While it's easy for new directions to be explored, it is nearly impossible for a direction to be chosen. Different teams and individuals have their own autonomy so they often choose their own path." This observation is echoed in a Glassdoor (2019a) review of Menlo innovations, which states, "Difficult to see if the company will expand much; drive is there but difficult to see direction." A similar criticism is also offered by Bernstein et al. (2016), who conclude that SMOs can struggle with strategy and that top-down organizations are better equipped “to make local trade-offs in service of scale” (p. 12) and to determine long-term investments. This was reinforced in research by Ronay et al. (2012), who found that for interdependent tasks, hierarchical differentiation enhanced group performance.

Summary of Research on SMOs

SMOs’ unique benefits and outsized performance often come at a cost. While some thrive within autonomy and empowerment, others may find the ambiguity and extra stress self-management can engender unsafe and unproductive. Moreover, even those that succeed in SMOs often must expend extra effort to mitigate some of their challenges. While research on member experience within SMOs is limited, initial data (Harjanne, 2012; Lee & Green, 2022; Nissi, 2021; Ryhänen, 2020) and research from other relevant fields suggest that a broad range of psychological, cognitive, developmental, social, and organizational hurdles must be overcome to succeed within an SMO. Thus, while SMOs may be superior to hierarchical organizations in some regards, they also place additional stress on their members. How members learn to manage the additional complexities of self-management and the additional challenges it poses is not yet understood—particularly during the onboarding period, when this unique way of working must be understood and internalized.

Topic 2: Onboarding

General Overview

The challenges of having to integrate into a new organizational structure and culture are not unique to SMOs. While a full review of the onboarding literature is unnecessary for this research (see Ashforth et al., 2018; Bauer, 2010; Van Maanen & Schein, 1977), there are some insights that are particularly relevant. These will be explored below and applied to an SMO setting.

Often used interchangeably with organizational socialization (Bauer et al., 2007), onboarding is defined as the “process of helping new hires adjust to social and performance aspects of their new jobs quickly and smoothly” (SHRM, 2010, p. 1). As argued by Van Maanen and Schein (1977), all new members of an organization need to learn how to see the world as do their more experienced colleagues. Socialization includes acquiring both the social knowledge and skills needed to take up an organizational role. This process is ongoing, but most intense just after a boundary change, such as entry (Van Maanen & Schein, 1977). While at times the shifts required are minor, such as during a rotation into a new department, at other times socialization requires transformation. Considering how different the values and practices of an SMO are from those of a traditional organization, it is expected that the shift required to fully socialize will be significant.

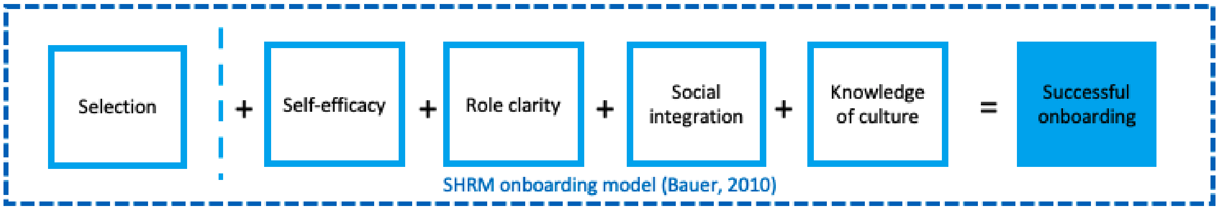
While often overlapping with induction (Jeske & Olson, 2021), socialization extends beyond the formal induction activities, such as orientation, to include fully learning the attitudes, behaviors, and knowledge needed to successfully function in the organization (Liao et al., 2010). This can be a process that extends over time, and often studied longitudinally (Bauer et al., 2007).

SHRM Model

In 2010, the SHRM Foundation commissioned Bauer to integrate much of the research on onboarding into an integrated approach for their “Effective Practice Guidelines Series”. Bauer’s (2010) model identified four key levers for effective onboarding.

Figure 2.1

Bauer's Onboarding Model



The first lever, self-efficacy, refers to the degree of confidence new employees have in their ability to do their job well. This confidence positively impacts motivation and increases commitment, satisfaction, and turnover (Bauer, 2010). Based on the literature (Saks, 1995), Bauer (2010) recommends training as a means of increasing self-efficacy.

The second lever is role clarity. Performance suffers from role ambiguity, while the understanding of the role and its expectations leads to improved performance. As noted by Bauer (2010), "measures of role clarity are among the most consistent predictors of job satisfaction and organizational commitment during the onboarding process" (p. 5).

The third lever is social integration. This includes both acceptance by one's peers as well as the informal learning that comes from connecting with organizational "insiders" (Bauer, 2010). Developing these strong relationships is an important component of socialization and a responsibility that is shared between the organization and the individual.

The fourth lever is the knowledge of culture. This includes understanding the culture from learning the politics, goals, values, and vocabulary of the organization, as well as finding one's place within it (Bauer, 2010).

While all these levers apply within an SMO, its unique structure may require them to be supplemented or utilized differently. Self-efficacy within an SMO may require a comfort with self-management, in addition to specific job skills that can be enhanced through training. Roles within an SMO are often intentionally fluid, and therefore complete role clarity may be hard to achieve. Moreover, the linearity suggested by this framework may not lend itself well to the complexity of an SMO, where role clarity or social integration can be in flux.

However, while some of the particulars may be different, the uniqueness of their culture only increases the importance of socialization within an SMO. Especially for members coming from a traditional organization, radical shifts in assumptions, values, and structures within an SMO require significant acculturation. As argued by Liao et al. (2010), this organizational socialization is “fundamentally a learning process” (p. 168), although not often framed or researched as such. The next section will explore this learning in greater detail, drawing upon research into SMOs and adult learning theory to identify what it may entail and how it can be supported.

Topic 3: The Shifts Required for Self-management and the Learning Needed to Support Them

Mindsets Needed within SMOs

While some attention has been paid to how leaders need to adopt to transition into self-management (Getz 2018), the practices of self-management (Slade, 2018), and to the transformation of traditional organizations into SMOs (Dignan, 2019a; Laloux, 2019; Slade, 2018), little attention has been given to the experience of SMO members. This echoes a broader pattern in organizational literature in which followership was often ignored and the world was viewed “from a leadership-centric vantage point” (Kelley, 2008, p. 11).

Moreover, there has yet to be a study that focuses on the experience of transitioning into an SMO. This topic is particularly important, as SMOs are so different from traditional organizations and thus require a period of acclimatization (Jansen, 2019). However, by drawing upon anecdotal accounts and relevant adjacent research, there are some suppositions we can make about the mindsets needed to successfully transition into an SMO. Each is listed in Table 2.1 and explored in the following paragraphs.

Table 2.1

Mindsets for Self-management Suggested by the Literature

Mindset	Source
Challenge your ego and to have it challenged by others	(Jansen, 2019); (Getz, 2019)
Solicit and give effective feedback	(Jansen, 2019); (Renkema, Bondarouk, & Bos-Nehles, 2018)
Be proactive	(Elman's, 2018)
Own your power and perspective	(Robertson, 2015); (Dignan, 2019a); (Zoll, 2018)
Trust others and the system.	(Janse, 2015)
Pay attention to the process and invest in shared learning	(Jansen, 2019); (Magpili & Pazos, 2017)

One cornerstone mindset that seems critical for success in an SMO is to *be ready to challenge your ego and to have it challenged by others*. As described by Jansen (2019), who helped lead the adaptation of self-management at Fitzii,

> [It's] not to say that it's easy to transition into self-management. It's emotionally difficult because it forces you to inspect your own ego, fears, and motivations, as you are constantly subjected to feedback and advice which shines a light on your impact on other people and the business. (para. 3)

This reflects the advice given by Getz (2019), who, after coaching dozens of organizations, stated, "For [the transformation] to succeed, all of the company's top managers must be leaders without ego" (p. 8).

Related to an egoless mindset is *the ability to solicit and give effective feedback*. As suggested by Katherine, who runs Business Development at Fitzii,

> Giv[e] consistent and meaningful tough feedback. I am a natural cheerleader and coach so giving positive feedback came second nature. However, I am someone who is very sensitive to people's feelings and giving tough feedback was initially excruciating for me. Once I truly understood that giving constructive feedback is all about caring for and caring about the person you are delivering it to, I suddenly became very adept at the process. It just took time to master this skill. (Jansen, 2019, "What Has Been The Hardest" section, para. 4)

This reflects research on Self-Managing Teams that found "it … important that employees in SMTs provide and receive timely feedback within their teams" and that "this proves to be one of the most difficult aspects of the transition" (Renkema et al., 2018, p. 83).

Another important mindset is to *be proactive.* As recounted by one of Elman's (2018) research subjects at Qamcom,

> When projects lean towards their end, there is no given path for what people are going to do next. This fluent structure and the Self-Management impose certain demands on the people. You must take initiative, you cannot expect to get any tasks just handled to you, you must simply ask yourself "maybe I can do this?" "Maybe I can help with that?" Then you may start finding areas you're interested in ... you cannot expect anyone to serve your job on a plate. (p. 61)

Concurrent with being proactive, an important part of success within SMOs is the ability to *own your power and perspective.* This is critical for many of the processes commonly used in SMOs, including making proposals (Robertson, 2015), stating your needs (Dignan, 2019a), and raising a tension (Robertson, 2015). This can be particularly challenging for members who have transitioned from traditional organizations where they are used to being shielded and protected by the organization (Laloux, 2019). As shared by a Hiring Success teammate at Fitzii, "I just wasn't used to being fully transparent about my interests, wants and needs" (Jansen, 2019, "What Has Been The Hardest" section, para. 9). This sentiment is echoed by Zoll (2018), who reflected,

> What I often observed (also about myself) was a certain kind of hesitance towards making a decision. The moment you decide, you are stepping into your power and lead. You stir and give direction. That can be scary. My observation was, that a lot of us hesitated because what happens if this isn't turning out well? In the end, what holds me

> back from making a decision was fear. The fear, that what I decided was wrong, not helpful or that I can't cope with the consequences. A big portion of feeling comfortable with making decisions come with experience and having the trust established amongst the team. ("Decision Making" section, 6)

To succeed members, must learn to overcome their fear and to make themselves vulnerable by taking a position. Moreover, they must learn to embrace the unique perspective their role or experience provides.

Yet, in parallel to owning their own voice and perspective, members of an SMO must also learn to *trust others and the system*. As described by Janse (2015), "Own your authority, and leave others theirs. The first is hard enough, the second may be even harder. Focus on driving your roles towards their purpose, trusting that others will do the same" ("Leading Your Role," para. 1, item 2). This is important, as most SMOs utilize a mix of role-based and consent-based decision-making (Dignan, 2019a; Laloux, 2014; Robertson, 2015; Slade, 2018). This means that members are often free to make autonomous decisions within the bounds of their role, or are required to get consent (not consensus) from their colleagues. Members can have significant disagreement about decisions other members are making. Yet, the assumption is that if those decisions are above the waterline (Gore, 2018) and will not sink the enterprise, they should be allowed, as the system will self-correct itself if needed (Dignan, 2019a).

As transitioning into an SMO requires the adoption of a completely new paradigm (Laloux, 2014), it is important to *pay attention to the process and invest in shared learning*—especially as the process of successfully adopting a self-managing mindset can take years. As described by Jansen (2019), "We've noticed that people's adoption of self-management is more like a journey than an event ... which can take anywhere from a few months to a few years, to get through" (para. 5). Therefore, coaching, training, and other forms of support are vital to help members successfully navigate this transition. This parallels Magpili and Pazos's (2017) research on Self-Managing Teams, which found that “[a]n overarching theme pervading SMT research is the need for change management as a vital component of SMT implementation” (p. 21).

Learning within an SMO

Many of the anecdotal accounts of transitioning into SMOs (such as those in the previous segment) refer to new mindsets (Elman, 2018; Jansen, 2019; Zoll, 2018) and strategies (Dignan, 2019a; Laloux, 2014; Slade, 2018) members had to learn in order to be successful within a self-managing system. However, no research has been done on how this learning took place or whether there are common patterns across SMOs’ members’ learning experience.

A deeper understanding of members’ learning journeys is important for several reasons. First, as has been explored, self-management can be challenging and may not be for everyone. Even more than organizational level processes, individuals’ learning and their ability to adapt to self-management have been found to impact success (Haslett, 2019). Understanding how new members learned and adapted to be successful with an SMO can inform future efforts to support others seeking to undertake a similar transition. Second, understanding how members learn to operate within SMOs can also serve to deepen our understanding of SMOs themselves. Third, as SMOs are an exciting new context, understanding how learning takes place within them will also serve to broaden our understanding of adult learning.

Types of Learning within SMOs

Drawing from Tjepkema’s (2003) research on self-managing work teams, we can infer that there are several different kinds of learning members of SMOs require. The first is related to all that is needed to fulfill their day-to-day work on the team. The second is learning that is needed to function effectively within the team, such as active listening, conflict resolution, and giving and receiving feedback. The third is learning required to participate in improving the team, such as analytical skills, a broad view of the organization and the role of the team within it, and the problem-solving skills needed to implement change.

More broadly, these categories can be divided into two kinds of learning. As described by Petrie (2015a), the first is “Horizontal Development,” that is, learning that is “adding of more knowledge, skills, and competencies” (p. 8) to what is already known. The second is “Vertical Development,” which is “advancement in a person’s thinking [itself]” (p. 8)—or, as he states metaphorically, “less emphasis on the content to be poured into the leader and more on the cup itself (the mind-set, identity, and mental models of the leader). The aim of Vertical Development is not to add more to the cup but to grow the size of the cup itself “ (p. 9). Incidentally, this closely parallels Kegan’s (2018) informative—change what you know—and transformative—change how you know—model.

All the processes and skills new SMO members must learn (such as how to define a role, generate a proposal, give feedback, follow the advice process, etc., as described in Dignan, 2019a; Robertson, 2015; and Slade, 2018) fit within the Horizontal Development category. Yet, alone they are not enough. To succeed within SMOs, members also must learn a new approach to thinking about themselves, others, and the governing dynamics between them. As described by Haslett (2019), “transitioning to self-management is less about adopting a new type of management structure, instead more about ‘adapting to a new philosophy’” (p. 33). This new philosophy is a drastic enough shift that Senge (2006) needs to draw upon ancient Greek to identify a word to express this level of personal change—”metonia,” meaning a shift of mind (p. 13). As quoted by Haslett (2019), “It’s forced me to change the way I think and act” (p. 33).

Within the adult learning literature, this kind of learning is characterized as Transformative Learning. As described by Mezirow (2012),

> Transformative learning refers to the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-set) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action. (p. 76)

However, as frames of reference are deeply embedded, challenging them is rarely easy. Mezirow (2012) cautions that this can be an “intense and difficult emotional struggle” (p. 87), as one’s sense of themselves and the world around them is confronted and reformed. This is particularly true for assumptions about power and hierarchy, which are often deeply held, having been reinforced over thousands of interactions. Moreover, assumptions about power and hierarchy are also socially reinforced. From our school system (Meshchaninov, 2012) to our media, hierarchy and its implicit assumptions about human beings are the norm, creating a cultural narrative in which all are enmeshed. As described by Fletcher (2004),

> While the rhetoric about leadership has changed at the macro level, the everyday narrative about leadership and leadership practices—the stories people tell about leadership, the mythical legends that get passed on as exemplars of leadership behavior—remains stuck in old images of heroic individualism. (p. 652)

This creates what Mezirow (2012) calls a “historical knowledge-power network” (p. 76) in which all are embedded.

Thus, Mezirow (1990) advocates for critical reflection and discourse. This process “challenges the validity of *presuppositions* in prior learning” (p. 12) in order to help one to become aware of their own tacit assumptions. Critical inquiry into one’s own assumptions leads to one being able to shift the implicit mindset that frames the way they think. It is this shifting of frames of reference that Mezirow calls transformative learning.

For members of an SMO, it is likely that this transformation must happen around both the habits of mind (broad ways of thinking, such as power is hierarchically distributed) and points of view or meaning schemes (specific ideas, such as get permission before acting) (Mezirow, 2012).

It will take shifting both to challenge what Lee and Edmondson (2017) describe as the "Norms, mindsets, and cultural assumptions that pervade modern organizational life combine to reinforce an all but taken-for-granted belief in managerial power as the primary mechanism for ensuring performance" (p. 3). Rosser (n.d.) goes even further, arguing that to truly achieve transformation change, "a more fundamental mind-shift: a change in values" (p. 3) is needed.

As conceptualized by Mezirow, dialogue is the main medium through which transformation occurs (Taylor, 2009). This dialogue and the critical reflection it fosters is essentially a rational process. This view of transformation is challenged by others, such as Dirkx (2006), who contends that while the conscious mind is an important component of transformation, it is often not the key. Rather, he posits it is our subconscious, the "shadowy inner world" (p. 26), that must be probed and explored. This requires a much deeper form of self-knowledge that explores both the conscious and subconscious sides of oneself. Otherwise, one is likely to be driven by the subconscious impulses while remaining unaware of them. Or, alternatively, risk having them "break through to consciousness … [through] deep feelings and emotions that erupt into our waking lives with a force that surprises even us" (p. 126).

Dirkx (2012), therefore, advocates for the use of imaginal techniques, such as narrative art, that can help elicit insights and understandings from the subconscious mind and help it come into dialogue with the conscious self. From this perspective, it is this bridging of the conscious and subconscious worlds that often leads to transformation. As described by Dirkx (2012), "insights or epiphanies are examples of the ego making conscious connections to psychic content that was previously unconscious. Such experiences are usually associated with a surge of psychic energy or emotion, such as surprise, enthusiasm, excitement or ... anger" (p. 118).

SMO members must contend with both the rational assumptions and subconscious meaning networks they are embedded in. Thus, both Mezirow's and Dirkx's conceptions of transformation are relevant. Moreover, as concepts of power and authority are so deeply embedded in the human psyche, for SMO members it is likely that both are needed. This sets SMOs apart. For while Dirkx (2012) contends that "Mezirow's theory focused on the adaptive task of instrumentally responding to reality demands, whereas the depth perspective emphasizes relational, emotional, and largely unconscious issues associated with the development of the individual, interpersonal interaction, and social development" (p. 117) within SMOs, the two are not separate. It may be that the ability to be successful instrumentally is directly connected to one's ability to self-empower, something often related to emotional and unconscious issues. Thus, SMOs provide a unique context in which both Mezirow's and Dirkx's conceptions of transformation must be blended. Moreover, SMOs' humanistic philosophy also intrinsically connects them to Transformative Learning:

> Transformation Theories focus is on how we learn to negotiate and act on our own purposes, values, feelings, and meanings rather than those we have uncritically assimilated from others-to gain greater control over our lives as socially responsible, clear-thinking decision makers. As such, it has particular relevance for learning in contemporary societies that share democratic values. (Mezirow, 2012, p. 76)

Mechanisms of Learning within SMOs

SMOs seem to utilize different mechanisms to support their members' Horizontal and Vertical development. The first is formal training and onboarding programs. As described by Laloux (2014), at Buurtzorg "all newly formed teams and all new recruits to existing teams take a training course called 'Solutions-Driven Methods of Interaction'" (p. 67) to learn skills for healthy group decision-making. At Morning Star, all new recruits "attend a seminar on the basics of self-management (p. 176), and new hires at Heiligenfeld "go through six training modules that include topics like 'self-mastery' and 'dealing with failure'" (p. 176).

However, despite significant investment in onboarding, most SMOs do not invest much in formal learning programs. Unlike in traditional organizations, where Learning and Development is often a function, within SMOs, “employees are in charge of their own learning” (Laloux, 2014, p. 178). This is by design, as many SMOs believe the best learning is contextual and on-the-job. As argued by Dignan (2019a), “we need to accept that we cannot distill or transfer knowledge completely. We need to [rather] create work environments with high social density where members with different levels of knowledge and competence can work and learn together” (p. 157). This echoes Bakke (2005), who writes, “The design of the AES workplace somewhat accidentally created one of the finest educational institutions around. The opportunity to make important decisions after participating in an intensive advice process helped people learn in an accelerated way” (p. 101).

In line with the idea of “learning by doing” (Dignan, 2019a, p. 156), SMO mentors and theorists focus on how to embed learning opportunities throughout the work week. These span from personal micro-practices, such as keeping a trigger log (Slade, 2018), to whole-company weekly reflection meetings (Laloux, 2014). Some notable examples include: Buutzorg’s peer-coaching, “all nurses are trained in ‘Intervise’ a peer-coaching technique” (Laloux, 2014, p. 157); Heiligenfeld’s large group reflection, “Every Tuesday morning, 350 employees come together for an hour and a quarter to engage in joint reflecting” (Laloux, 2014, p. 155); Meeting practices such as beginning meetings with silence and mindfulness (Laloux, 2014); a check-in round (Dignan, 2019a); and closing meetings with a reflective check-out round (Dignan, 2019a).

This emphasis on learning through doing aligns with what adult learning literature terms informal learning (Marsick & Watkins, 2001), which is often self-directed, unstructured, and not classroom-based. Moreover, the “accidental” educational impact of SMOs’ design, Bakke (2005) mentions, matches what Marsick and Watkins (2001) term “incidental learning.” Incidental learning occurs when “learning may be taken for granted, tacit, or unconscious” (p. 26). The importance of informal and incidental learning within SMOs mirrors research on self-managing teams. As recounted by Tjepkema (2003), “research results indicate that informal workplace learning is very important in self-managing work teams. The workplace serves as a ‘learning environment,’ both for ‘spontaneous,’ unintentional learning, as well as for intentional learning” (p. 194).

Marsick and Watkins (2001) propose that informal and incidental learning can take place without much formal structure. However, they do note that three conditions are required: “critical reflection to surface tacit knowledge and beliefs, stimulation of proactivity on the part of the learner to actively identify options and to learn new skills to implement those options or solutions, and creativity to encourage a wider range of options” (p. 30). This process closely resembles the looping Dignan (2019a) described successful SMOs as utilizing. This looping consists of three recursive stages: “Sensing Tensions, Proposing Practices, and Conducting Experiments” (p. 201).

Yet, as noted in Watkins et al.’s (2018) revision of informal learning theory, their informal model is more a heuristic than a linear journey. Informal learning is a continuous process that ebbs and flows as new needs push people to try new things, which they then reflect upon. This process is also deeply influenced by the social and organization context in which the learning is taking place (Watkins et al., 2018).

Moreover, similar to Dirkx (2012), Nicolaides and Scully-Russ (2018) expand informal learning beyond just a shift in cognition to include the full “constellation of emotions, thoughts, sensations, as well as in relational, cultural, and physical entanglements” (p. 115). In addition, they challenge the original formulation of informal learning, which framed a dialectic between an initial trigger and its ultimate resolution. Rather, they argue for a continuously unfolding learning process that enables people to "live and learn within the ambiguity of paradoxical tensions" (p 112). This changes the goal of informal learning from resolution to an expanded ability to live with or manage the original challenge.

This is a more nuanced perspective than Mezirow (2012), whose transformative learning model consists of ten steps that culminate in an integrated new perspective:

> 1) Disorienting dilemma, 2) self-examination of feelings, 3) critical assessment, 4) recognition of shared transformation process, 5) option exploration of new roles and actions, 6) action planning, 7) acquisition of knowledge and skills, 8) trying new roles, 9) building competence and self-confidence, and 10) reintegration of new perspective into life. (p. 86)

While each of these steps may not always be necessary, they do chart the process of being confronted by the limitations of one's current "frame of mind," exploring a new "frame of mind" and then the reintegration of the new "frame of mind." This closely mirrors Kurt Lewin's (1947) change model of "unfreeze," "change," and "refreeze," suggesting that individual and organizational transformation share some of the same characteristics. Within this framework, the "disorienting dilemma" serves a critical role, pushing one to confront the underpinnings of their thinking and the limitations of their current assumptions and mental models. The need for a confronting experience is shared by Petrie (2015b), who charts the course of Vertical Development as: first, facing a complex situation that disrupts and disorients one's habitual way of thinking; second, exposure to new ideas that challenge existing mental models and broadens perspectives; lastly, using a process or a coach to help integrate these perspectives for a more advanced worldview.

At the heart of Mezirow's model are the stages of "experience, critical reflection, reflective discourse, and action" (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 134). These closely match the stages

Petrie (2015b) describes, with particular emphasis on the critical reflection that challenges one's existing mental models.

Table 2.2

Integrated View of the Transformational Learning Process

Vertical development (Petrie, 2015b, p.3)	**Transformative Learning (**Mezirow, 2012, p.86)	**Social Change Model (**Lewin, 1947)
1. Heat Experiences The leader faces a complex situation that disrupts and disorients his habitual way of thinking. He discovers that his current way of making sense of the world is inadequate. His mind starts to open and search for new and better ways to make sense of his challenge.	1) A disorienting dilemma, 2) Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt or shame 3) A critical assessment of assumptions	UNFREEZING (if necessary) the present level
2. Colliding Perspectives The leader is then exposed to people with different worldviews, opinions, backgrounds, and training. This both challenges his existing mental models and increases the number of perspectives through which he can see the world.	4) Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared 5) Explorations of options for new roles, relationships, and actions 6) Planning a new course of action 7) Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plan	MOVING to the new level
3. **Elevated Sensemaking** The leader then uses a process or a coach to help him integrate and make sense of these perspectives and experiences from more elevated stages of development. A larger, more advanced worldview emerges and, with time, stabilizes.	8) Provisional trying of new roles 9) Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships 10) A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective.	FREEZING group life on the new level.

Although Nicolaides and Scully-Russ (2018) dispute the need for a trigger within informal learning, anecdotally, many SMO founders report being inspired by a disorienting dilemma-like moment prior to creating their SMO. As recounted by Laloux (2014), "the trigger for vertical growth always comes in the form of a major life challenge that cannot be resolved from the current worldview" (p. 39). This trigger generally takes two forms. "One was exasperation with the consequence of trying to manage the "how"; the other was "admiration for liberated companies" (Carney & Getz, 2009, p. 74). This was the case for Kolind, the transformational leader at Oticon. "[H]e'd become exasperated with the bureaucratic sutures of other places he'd worked and believed that a company could be rebuilt along radically free lines" (Carney & Getz, 2009, p. 140). This was also true for Jos de Blok, the founder of Buurtzorg. "Jos had been a nurse for 10 years and had then climbed the ladder to assume management functions and staff roles in a nursing organization. When he saw that he couldn't effect change from the inside, he decided to start his own organization" (Laloux, 2014, p. 65). For new members joining an SMO the radical shifts they experience may serve themselves as a "disorienting dilemma".

In addition, these accounts illustrate how self-management theory can serve as a frame for individuals seeking to make sense of their disorienting experiences. This was true in the case of Zobrist, the founder of FAVI, whose belief in self-management is traced by Getz (2011) as originating in the work of "his primary intellectual mentor, Jean-Christian Fauvet, [who] created his own approach to nourishing organizations in the early 1970s" (p. 9). However, while his mentor sowed the seeds, it was only when he was confronted by disorienting experiences, after taking control of FAVI, that his mental model shifted (Carney & Getz, 2009).

In addition to academic theorists and mentors, there are other important influences that seem to help foster transformative shifts toward self-management. Many of these date back to early childhood, when initial mindset are formed. This was the case with USAA CEO Bob McDermott, who said, "All I really need to know I learned in Sunday school ... Treating people as the unique equally valuable human beings they are" (Carney & Getz, 2009, p. 185). The importance of deeply held values seems to echo throughout anecdotal accounts of transformational pioneers. Zobrist, the transformational leader of FAVI, believed so deeply in the importance of its progressive values that he titled his book, *The Organization that Believes that Mankind is Good* (Laloux, 2014, p. 80). This belief then served as the cornerstone for the systems and policies he and his team created. As he wrote in his autobiography:

> [M]ost organizational structure was designed for people who are thieves, lazy, not dependable, not intelligent. At FAVI they designed the organization based upon the idea that people are good, there is no performance without happiness, and value is created on shop floor. (as translated by Laloux, 2014, p. 109)

Another example is that of Blake (2005), the CEO of AES, who stated in his autobiography that he was "writing from a God-centered world perspective rather than a human-centered world perspective" (p.16). Moreover, this trend is not specific to Western companies. Zhang Ruimine CEO of Haier shared, "We encourage employees to become entrepreneurs because people are not a means to an end, but an end in themselves. Our goal is to let everyone become their own CEO ... to help everyone fully realize their potential" (Hamel, 2018, p. 59).

These anecdotes illustrate that prior to the transformative experience that led them to embrace self-management, many SMO founders had values and experiences that made them "fertile soil" for such ideas to "take root." Whether this is also the case for members of SMOs is still unknown.

The Social Dimension of Learning within SMOs

As noted by Watkins et al. (2018), in addition to the individual lens of transformation that Mezirow (2012), Dirkx (2012), and Petrie (2015a) apply, to understand the experience of transitioning into an SMO, we must also apply a social lens. SMOs are groups of people, all of whom must adopt new mindsets and strategies for the SMO to be successful. Thus, members' individual transformation is taking place and potentially impacted by the journey of the broader group. This aligns with the perspective of socially minded adult learning theorists such as Bandura (1977), who highlighted the impact of social observation on learning, and Boucouvalas (1988), who challenged the "exclusive emphasis on the autonomous self as only a partial explanation of what self-hood is all about" (as quoted in, Merriam et al., 2007, p. 124).

Moreover, many of the shifts required for self-management can only happen within a group:

> Such concepts as group responsibility, reaching decisions by majority vote, delegating authority to responsible officers, observing rules agreed upon by the group, exerting self-discipline for the welfare of the group, cannot be taught or learned in the abstract. They must become part of the personality of the individual and the experience of the group through actual situations. For the great majority of people, the co-operative society engaged in the day-to-day requirements of life and earning a living becomes the ideal vehicle through with these concepts are acquired. (Laidlaw, 1962, pp. 10-11)

Thus, for SMO members, part of the reintegration phase Mezirow (2012) mentions can only take place within the context of the group. This is especially true for the informal learning that takes place within groups. As pointed out by Marsick et al. (2006), "informal/incidental learning at work is increasingly socially situated and socially constructed" (p. 797). Moreover, as argued by Scully-Russ and Boyle (2018), informal learning is "intersubjective; it occurs as people realize how their own capacities, what they know and can do, feel, and believe, are deeply influenced by others and indeed can only be realized in relationship to others" (p. 49).

A rich illustration of this is Argentina's ERTs (worker-recuperated enterprise), which—after they were abandoned by their owners—were reopened by the workers. This created a unique context for learning self-management collectively. As described by Vieta (2014), "they become cooperators in the act of 'doing' self-management. As one worker told me explicitly: 'Aprendimos cooperativismo … sobre la marcha' ('We learned cooperativism … on the path of doing')" (p. 187). This learning was informal and based on "the social bonds that form organically on shop floors" (p. 197). The shared process of learning "cooperativism" while "doing" creates a powerful container for transformative learning, and the effect on the workers is described as "paradigm shifting" (p. 194).

SMOs share many characteristics with Argentina's ERTs as described by Vieta (2014). They are composed of members who need to learn self-management, while simultaneously doing the work of the organization. However, further research is needed to understand if the member experience and learning patterns are similar.

In addition to the social embeddedness of learning self-management, the collective nature of SMOs also provides opportunity for social support. As all members are practicing self-management together, they can serve as de facto communities of practice, which facilitate the sharing of information, retaining knowledge, developing competencies, and providing identity (Wenger, 1998). This is the case in worker cooperatives, where, as described by Quarter and Midha (2001), members learn governance informally from other members and there is an "oral tradition whereby knowledge is passed from the older to the newer members [that] was important in transmitting the co-operative's philosophy and background knowledge" (p. 9).

Learning Challenges within SMOs

Transformative learning (Mezirow, 2012), Vertical Development (Petrie, 2015a), and informal learning (Watkins et al., 2018) provide a potential framework and some direction for how members learn and internalize self-management. However, transitioning into an SMO is a unique context that poses different challenges members will have to face.

First, members transitioning from traditional organizations will have to challenge themselves to take ownership over their own learning. Moreover, in addition to having to manage their own learning, members entering an SMO are often hit with a barrage of change. By challenging core precepts of traditional management, SMOs are *radically* (Lee & Edmondson,

2017) different, and thus change will be experienced simultaneously on multiple fronts. This is especially true for organizations and teams seeking to transform to SMO. As noted by Gunderson and Holling (2002), "transformation can be the most radical form of change an organization can experience, requiring significant learning and change at speed which is often traumatic" (as quoted in, Morris, 2015).

The potentially traumatic rush of adaptation required when joining an SMO makes it less likely that members will be able to successfully self-direct their learning. As stated by Merriam et al. (2007), "when coping with a crisis ... people may need or want to rely on the information and direction of others" (p. 123). However, by design, this kind of supportive direction is often not available to those who join an SMO.

Additionally challenging is the fact that not all people are ready for the learning required to succeed in an SMO. As explored previously, it seems to require a self-authoring mind (Drago-Severson et al., 2013) which many people have yet to develop (Kegan, et al., 2016). Furthermore, "people do not have the same level of skill or awareness around contextual factors that influence an interpretation, and they are subject to blind spots that can, at times, be intensified when emotional factors come into play" (Marsick & Watkins, 2001, p. 31). This may help explain why, of all the factors influencing the adoption of self-managing, "individual capability is the strongest antecedent for building a self-managing organizational system" (Piela, 2018, p. 71, as quoted in Haslett, 2019, p. 39). This suggests that there must be a baseline of readiness before one joins an SMO due to all the transformative shifts that are needed. This is also substantiated by research by Lee (2019), who found that members' performance prior to the transition into self-management helped predict if they would be successful once they made the transition.

In addition to the challenge faced by the broadness of the change, members transitioning into self-management also must contend with the depth of the change required. “[F]reeing oneself from existing mental models that constrain the way work is done is not easy” (Marsick and Watkins, 2001, p. 27). Moreover, as has been explored, paradigms of power and hierarchy are deeply entrenched on both a conscious and subconscious level. They are also reinforced socially by what Dirkx (2012) terms the “distorting effects of coercive forces on human consciousness” (p. 126), such as a growing trend toward authoritarianism within the broader culture (Rosenberg, 2019a).

Lastly, mental models about power and hierarchy are inevitably linked to historical concepts of gender. As described by Fletcher (2004),

> The skills and attributes needed to enact postheroic leadership—things like collaboration, sharing, and teamwork—are aligned in our mind’s eye with displays of femininity. This alignment may engage some unconscious processes that can help explain why images of heroic leadership are so resilient: It is not just that new images of leadership violate traditional assumptions about individualism and business success, it is that they violate genderlinked assumptions about these concepts and practices. (p. 653)

Therefore, male and female members may have different experiences seeking to adapt to SMO practices and mindsets.

Summary

There are significant psychological, biological, developmental, cognitive, social, and organizational challenges to working in SMOs that require further research and exploration. Despite the exuberant claims of some advocates, some SMOs struggle to actualize their lofty ideals in practice. Furthermore, when unmet, their aspiration vision can serve to further disengage their members and weaken morale. As stated by former Valve employee Jeri Ellsworth, “[Valve] promised me the world and then backstabbed me” (as quoted by Warr, 2013, para. 6).

Even when successful, the changeover cost required for employees transitioning into these new ways of working is still not understood. While there have clearly been significant and demonstrative benefits to self-management, more research is needed to understand what learning is required to successfully onboard into an SMO and how that process can be supported.

Literature from adult learning and adult development can provide a framework to help conceptualize some of the transformative learning required to transition into self-management. Moreover, as recounted by Henderson (2002), while some change theorists operate "under the assumption that, by changing structure, work processes, and climate in the organization, one can affect change in individuals ... they do not appear sufficient'' (p. 211). Thus, it is important to draw upon the "the transformative learning theorists [who] focus on change at the individual level" (p. 211).

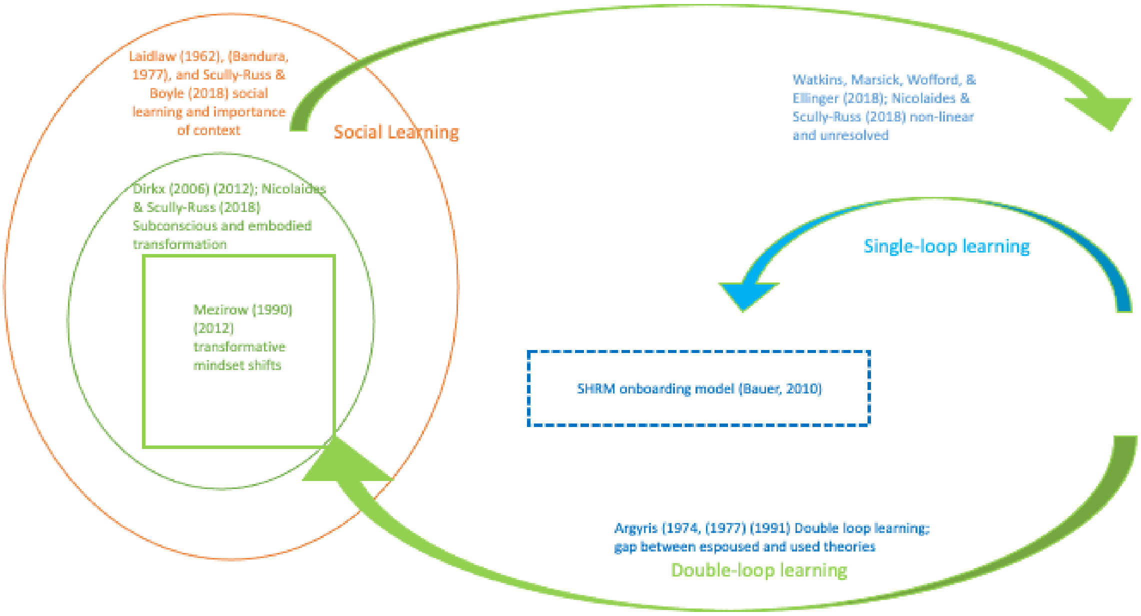
Understanding the unique experience of transitioning into an SMO and the learning it requires can help fill an important gap in our understanding of self-management. This understanding can help support SMOs as they seek to onboard new members. Without this insight, attempts to replicate the structures of successful SMOs are likely to fail. As illustrated by the unsuccessful attempts to replicate Toyota's success that failed due to a sole focus on the tools and structure at the expense of understanding its mindsets and assumptions about its workers (Carney & Getz 2009). As the future of work continues to evolve, the need for alternative organizational models will only grow. Thus, an understanding of the learning required for self-management is of increasing importance.

Conceptual Framework Narrative

An ongoing review and analysis of the literature has informed the development of a conceptual framework that served as an organizing structure for this inquiry. As visually depicted in Figure 2.2 below, this study's conceptual framework integrates several theories into one comprehensive model for the learning required for SMO onboarding. This model consists of layers of learning and analysis that build on each other. At its foundation is the traditional SHRM onboarding model (Bauer, 2010). This depicts the standard linear onboarding process, which is necessary for new members to learn the mechanics of self-management. However, this is not sufficient. Argyris's (1977, 1991) concept of the gap-between an espoused theory and theory in use that triggers double-loop learning and Mezirow's (1990, 2012) transformative learning inform the mindset shifts that must take place to enable self-management. These are nested within the more holistic emotional and embodied transformations that draw upon the work of Dirkx (2006, 2012) and Nicolaides and Scully-Russ (2018). Both the mindset and embodied transformations are in turn nested in the broader social context, which, as suggested by Laidlaw (1962), (Bandura, 1977), and Scully-Russ and Boyle (2018), plays an integral role in the learning

Figure 2.2

Conceptual Framework for SMO Onboarding Learning Process



Laidlaw (1962), (Bandura, 1977), and Scully-Russ & Boyle (2018) social learning and importance of context
Social Learning
Dirkx (2006) (2012); Nicolaides & Scully-Russ (2018) Subconscious and embodied transformation
Mezirow (1990) (2012) transformative mindset shifts
Watkins, Marsick, Wofford, & Ellinger (2018); Nicolaides & Scully-Russ (2018) non-linear and unresolved
Single-loop learning
SHRM onboarding model (Bauer, 2010)
Argyris (1974, (1977) (1991) Double loop learning; gap between espoused and used theories
Double-loop learning

process. Lastly, all these learnings are looped back to Watkins et al. (2018) and Nicolaides and Scully-Russ (2018), who make the point that while the shifts may have been transformative, the process is ongoing, nonlinear, and not completely resolved.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction and Overview

The purpose of this case-study was to research 15 members who onboarded into self-managing organizations (SMOs) to understand the learning that was required and how it was supported. Considering that an increasing number of organizations are seeking to fully or partially adopt self-organization, it was hoped that a deeper understanding of the onboarding process will enable SMOs to better integrate new members and broaden our understanding of self-management.

To understand members' perceptions of their learning journey, the following research questions were explored:

RQ1: How did participants experience their onboarding?

RQ2: What unique challenges were present onboarding into self-management, and where within the organization did those challenges reside?

RQ3: What kind of learning was needed to help new members meet these onboarding challenges?

RQ4: What was supportive to new members learning as they onboarded?

This chapter will present the process and methods used to explore these questions. Included are: (a) the rationale for a qualitative research approach, (b) description of the research sample, (c) overview of information needed, (d) overview of the research design, (e) data collection methods, (f) data analysis and synthesis, (g) ethical considerations, (h) issues of trustworthiness, (i) limitations of the study, and (j) the chapter summary.

Rationale for Qualitative Research Approach

Qualitative research is grounded in a constructivist view in that it is “concerned with how the complexities of the sociocultural world are experienced, interpreted, and understood in a particular context and time” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 80). Therefore, qualitative research is focused on the sense people make of their experience. As described by Rubin and Rubin (2005), “how people view an object or event and the meaning that they attribute to it is what is important” (p. 27). This resonated with the aim of this research, which sought to understand members' learning journeys, which are inherently subjective.

The aim of understanding perceptions is different from the positivist view that undergirds traditional quantitative research, which seeks to extract understanding from a careful examination of the natural world and observable phenomena. Constructivists look for the meaning that is created by the people who are being studied. Therefore, the focus of this study was not seeking the average across a large group, but, as argued by Rubin and Rubin (2005), to build an understanding based on the specific. This was the approach I utilized as I focused on a deep understanding of 15 participants' experiences, rather than a broad understanding of a large sample.

Of the different methods available, this study utilized a modified case study. As described by Berg (2009), case studies “provide a kind of deep understanding of phenomena, events, people, organizations…. In essence, case studies open the door to the processes created and used by individuals involved in the phenomena, event, group, or organization under study” (p. 319). Moreover, as argued by Yin (2003), “case studies are the preferred strategy when 'how' or 'why' questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context” (p. 1).

This study's inquiry matched the criteria above. It focused on understanding “how” participants experienced their onboarding and “how” they learned their way through it. This research also sought to understand “why” some seem to struggle and “why” onboarding required so much energy. Each of these questions were about “a contemporary phenomenon within some real life contexts” (Yin, 2003, p. 1). Furthermore, as little research has been done on SMOs, I assumed that quantitative methods would not elicit the nuance or depth of insight needed to holistically understand the learning required to onboard into an SMO. A modified case study using qualitative methods allowed me to understand what has taken place, the meaning that participants made of it, key contextual factors that may have influenced the experience, and salient patterns that emerged. It was “modified” in that it primarily focused on the shared experience of onboarding into an SMO, rather than on also deeply exploring the organizational context new members were embedded in.

Description of the Research Sample

This study interviewed 15 individuals who had joined an SMO within the past three years. Purposeful sampling criteria were used to select the sample. As described by Bloomberg and Volpe (2008), criterion sampling “works well when all individuals studied represent people who have experienced the same phenomenon” (p. 69). The criteria for this study were initially defined as (a) having worked within a traditional, hierarchical organization, and (b) having onboarded into an SMO within the past two years. The criteria were selected with the assumption that those coming from a traditional organization would have a greater need for onboarding and another experience against which they could compare their learning journey within the SMO. Participants earlier in their tenure were targeted with the assumption that they would have a more accurate recollection of their onboarding experience. During the recruitment process, three of the participants' tenure went beyond the two-year mark, but the decision was made to include them as they still were able to speak powerfully to their onboarding experience and were a minority of the total study. Moreover, an analysis of the participant responses revealed no significant difference between these participants and the rest of the cohort.

As much is still unknown about the impact of organizational culture and context on the experience of self-management, participants were drawn from several different organizations. This allowed for a broader range of experience and enabled some cross-subgroup comparisons and analysis. Fourteen of the 15 participants came from the same four organizations, while the 15th participant engaged individually. For more specifics about the participant demographics and the four organizations they were primarily drawn from, see the beginning of Chapter 4.

Initial organizations that met the study criteria were identified through my extended professional network. I then solicited participation through email and Linkedin outreach. Once I had some interested members, I utilized snowball sampling (Yin, 2011), in which participants recommended others who met the criteria.

Overview of Information Needed

This case study consisted of 15 participants who had joined a self-managing organization within the past three years. The research questions were designed to elicit their perceptions of the learning that was required as they onboarded. As part of this exploration, demographic, contextual, and perceptual information were sought, each of which will be described below.

Contextual Data

This study sought to understand the learning required to onboard into an SMO. As SMOs have a wide range of cultures (as explored in Chapter 2), contextual information about the organizations the participants belonged to was important to fully comprehending their experiences. As argued by Lewin (1946), behavior is a function of the interaction between a person and their environment. Therefore, understanding the environment helped frame the context in which members' perceptions were formed. Specifically, information was gathered about the organizational background, onboarding, training, self-management culture, conflict resolution processes, and forums for shared sense-making and processing. This information was collected from a review of the organizations' available internal and external documents, as well as from questions asked in the interview.

Moreover, contextual information about participants, including their previous work histories and experience with self-management, was collected from the demographic inventory and through questions asked in the interview.

Demographic Data

While of limited value when trying to make sense of complex phenomena (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008), surveys are an efficient method for the collection of demographic data. Therefore, I utilized a demographic survey to collect the data needed to explore possible patterns within participants' backgrounds. The questionnaire I used gathered information, including: (a) age, (b) gender, (c) level of education, (d) general work experience, and (e) experience within an SMO. Study participants completed the demographic questionnaire prior to beginning the interviews.

Perceptual Information

Perceptual data, or information about the way participants make sense of their experience (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008), were collected from all 15 participants during their interviews. These data shed light on the four research questions previously listed. Data collected from each participant was then analyzed and compared to the others in order to identify individual and shared patterns.

Table 3.1

Demographic, Contextual, and Perceptual Information that was Collected

Type of Information	What the Researcher Required	Method
Demographic	Descriptive information regarding participants age, gender, level of education, prior work experience, prior experience in an SMO	Survey
Contextual information	Organizational background and processes including: onboarding, training, self-management culture, conflict resolution processes, and forums for shared sense-making and processing Contextual information about participants including their previous work histories and experience with self-management	Document review Interviews
Perceptual	Research questions: 1. How did participants experience their onboarding? 2. What unique challenges were present onboarding into self-management, and where within the organization did those challenges reside? 3. What kind of learning was needed to help new members meet these onboarding challenges? 4. What was supportive to new members learning as they onboarded?	Interview

Overview of Research Design

This was a modified case study that explored the learning required to onboarding into an SMO. Table 3.2 presents the steps that were followed to complete this research.

Table 3.2.

The Research Process

Step 1	**Research topic identification:** My personal experience as a member of an SMO, internal mentor, and consultant to other organizations inspired the selection of this topic.
Step 2	**Literature Review:** I conducted a literature review that spanned three key topics. (1) The history, success, and challenges of Self-Managing Organizations (2) Onboarding and organizational socialization (3) the mindset shifts required for self-management and the learning needed to support them. This review helped identify gaps in the literature, informed the research questions, and surfaced possible connections among different disciplines. An ongoing review of the literature was also continued during the data analysis phase to inform the interpretation of the data that was collected.
Step 3	**Proposal Hearing:** The proposal hearing took place during the fall of 2021. Revisions suggested by the adviser and second reader were incorporated into the final proposal.
Step 4	**IRB Approval:** An expedited approval by Teachers College IRB was received on January 5th, 2022.
Step 5	**Letter of invitation:** Upon receiving IRB approval I reached out to potential participants through email to determine their interest in participating in this study. As part of this outreach I shared a letter of invitation outlining the goal of the project, interview format, and interview logistics
Step 6	**Pre-Interview:** At the beginning of each call, prior to the interview taking place, I reviewed the purpose and process of the interview and shared a digital form. This form was comprised of two parts: ● Informed consent form: Explained the purpose of the study and outlined participants rights, assurance of confidentiality, and the data collection process that will be used. ● A demographic questionnaire: A demographic inventory that asked participants to self-categorize across 5 dimensions.
Step 7	**Interview:** An in-depth interview took place with 15 participants in order to understand their experience onboarding into an SMO and the learning they required. The interviews were approximately 60 minutes each.

Table 3.2 (continued)

Step 8	**Document review:** I reviewed key documents about the interviewees' organizational context including–culture, history, and processes– to provide contextual background to the interviews.
Step 9	**Interview Transcription and Coding:** I then coded transcripts of the interviews' audio recording.
Step 10	**Data Analysis:** Information collected from the demographic inventory, document review, and interviews was analyzed individually and collectively based upon the conceptual framework and emergent themes that arose.
Step 11	**Focus Group:** For additional information and a potentially contrasting perspectives, I held a focus group with tenured SMO members who have supported new members onboarding journey's. I shared emergent themes and key patterns from the interviews for their reflections and experiences with the topics that were identified.

Key steps within this list will be expounded upon below.

Literature Review

As argued by Yin (2011), it is important for researchers "to show their awareness, if not adroitness, in identifying specific lines of research ... that are likely to bear directly on a new study's topic" (p. 62). This is usually accomplished through a review of the salient literature, which also serves to help guide the development of the research questions and conceptual framework. An ongoing and selective review of the literature was undertaken to elucidate this study's topic. As academic research on SMOs is scarce, it included popular media, blog posts, and other forms of literature (see Chapter 2 for more details). Three key topics within the literature were focused on: the history, success, and challenges of SMOs; relevant insights from the literature on onboarding and organizational socialization; and the mindset shifts required for self-management and learning needed to support them.

Data Collection Methods

This study utilized several data collection methods in order to provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon at hand and to add rigor to this research. The use of multiple methods is also called “triangulation,” which, as Yin (2011) describes, began as a navigational term “where the intersection of three different reference points is used to calculate the precise location on an object” (p. 81). Triangulation is now often used in qualitative research to strengthen the validity of the study (Yin, 2011) and to reduce the risk of “systemic biases or limitations of a specific source or method” (Maxwell, 2005 p. 94). The three data collection methods used in this study were document review, interviews, and a focus group.

Document Review. Public documents and other information found online can be an important source of information (Yin, 2011). While permission for their use must be granted, internal and private documents can also provide useful data (Creswell, 2007). Document review works with existing information and therefore can be easier and less time-consuming than other data collection methods. Moreover, as noted by Yin (2003), documents can be used in case studies to corroborate evidence from other sources, verifying the correct spelling and titles of key individuals, or to make inferences that can inform future investigation. Moreover, in this case, public information, such as reviews on Glassdoor.com, shed additional light on the organizations' culture, onboarding practices, and general climate.

However, there are several drawbacks to relying upon other people’s documentation. First, as pointed out by Yin (2011), every document was written with a certain perspective in mind, and it is important to “understan[d] the potential biases inherent in them” (p. 150). This is especially true about SMOs, which seem to elicit polarizing commentary (Lee & Edmondson, 2017). Second, existing documentation may not cover the specific areas of inquiry a study wishes to pursue. This was the case regarding this study, where the learning required during onboarding was scarcely documented. Lastly, as has been mentioned (Creswell, 2007), permission is needed to access private documents, which may not always be given. In this study, access to internal emails, slack messages, journal entries, and recorded team meetings was withheld for privacy or legal reasons. However, other materials, such as onboarding handbooks and internal wikis, were shared.

Interviews. A 60-75 minute interview was chosen as the primary method of data collection for this study. It was chosen because it had the potential to offer the richest data on participant experiences. As described by Seidman (2006), "at the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (p. 9). Moreover, the interview is also flexible enough to clarify statements or probe for more information as the conversation ensues (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

While some interviews are entirely unstructured, this study employed a semi-standardized (Berg, 2009) or focused (Yin, 2003) interview in which there were a set of questions that were explored in an open-ended and conversational manner. The questions were derived from the conceptual framework and emergent themes with guidance from my advisor. The interview process was also accompanied by continual analysis. As suggested by Yin (2011):

> Data collection is continually accompanied by analysis. You will be deciding when to probe for more detail, when to shift topics, when to modify your original protocol or agenda to accommodate new revelations. These are all analytic choices, and you need to make them sensitively, so that the other person is neither surprised nor lost by your part of the conversation. (p. 139)

While the interview offered an opportunity for rich data collection, like with all methods, it did have several limitations. First, as noted by Creswell (2007), "the mechanics of the interview can be challenging" (p. 140). This was particularly true, as the interview took place via video conference and there were technological and logistical hurdles to overcome to ensure the participant and interviewer were able to hear and see each other. Second, the skill and ability of the interviewer have a significant impact on the quality and accuracy of the data gathered. As Creswell (2007) argues, the “phrasing of the questions can influence the responses” (p. 140), and a “warm relationship and rapport with interviewee” (p. 140) is important for them to honestly share their experience. Lastly, as noted by Yin (2003), interviewees often have issues with poor recall, bias, or inaccurate expression. This was particularly true with this group of participants, as for many English was a second language and it is possible that they did not express themselves as accurately as they would have in their primary language.

Focus Groups. A one-hour focus group was utilized to further explore some of the emergent themes that arose in the interviews and to substantiate some of the findings (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Focus groups enable “learning through discussion” and are particularly useful when exploring “conscious, semiconscious, and unconscious psychological and sociocultural characteristics and processes among various groups” (Berg, 2009, p. 158). While the group was composed of participants from different organizations, it was “focused” in that all participants had a common experience (Yin, 2011), namely, supporting new member learning within SMOs. Participation was solicited from each of the four primary organizations participants were drawn from, and representation was confirmed with three of the four organizations. On the date of the focus group, only representatives from two of the organizations were able to attend. These were both not members of the interview group and had specific experience supporting new member learning in their organization.

As suggested by Berg (2009), I opened the discussion with brief introductory remarks and guidelines, after which highlights from the study's findings were shared with the group and some open-ended prompts were used to elicit their own experiences supporting new member learning. Participants also asked each other questions as the discussion unfolded.

Key advantages of a focus group are that they are efficient in gathering large amounts of data within a short amount of time (Berg, 2009) and that the group dynamic can stimulate a deeper discussion of the topic at hand through the synergy generated by participants interacting with each other (Berg, 2009; Creswell, 2007). On the other hand, the group dynamics of a focus group can also be a disadvantage if not facilitated skillfully, as powerful voices can dominate the conversation (Creswell, 2007). Additional disadvantages included limited time, groupthink (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008), and the potential to be influenced by the facilitator (Berg, 2009). Thus, deliberate facilitation and advanced planning were essential in order to successfully contribute meaningful information. This study also had the advantage of having participants whose experience with collective governance may have contributed to their advanced interpersonal skills. While there was some spirited discussion, members skillfully self-managed their participation and invited other perspectives.

Data Analysis and Synthesis

This research required the collection and analysis of several varied data sources. The core aspects of data analysis included coding the data, combining the codes into meaningful themes, and displaying and making comparisons between the themes (Creswell, 2007). The process of data coding is itself a process of analysis and categorization (Saldaña, 2011), and thus careful thought was given to the process used. As there are many different methods to code data, it was important that the method chosen matched the research goals and context (Saldaña, 2011).

I began by using NVivo software to code and explore my initial findings. As described by Saldaña (2011), my coding framework evolved as data were collected and analyzed. For the first cycle of coding, I utilized descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2011) to capture the initial emerging themes. Codes that emerged included a wide range of different experiences that bucketed into broad categories, such as “challenges with self-management,” “benefits of self-management,” and “was supportive.” In my second cycle of coding, I further refined the categories and, guided by the research questions and conceptual framework, focused on several specific categories, such as “personal challenges,” “learning strategies,” and “formal onboarding.” I then added additional subcodes within those categories to further clarify the specific experiences across the participant group. Sub-categories included codes such as “lack of accountability,” “overwhelm,” and “setting boundaries.”

I also utilized paper copies of the transcripts to analyze each interview holistically and to distill some of the key themes that were present. Themes that emerged included “critical role of social validation” and “staggered onramping.” These broader themes enabled me to further crystallize some of the insights I was seeking in the data.

During my third cycle of coding, I bucketed the many subcategories in NVivo into a few key parent themes, such as “double-loop learning" and “organizational challenges with self-management.” These themes formed the base of the findings described in Chapter 4. In addition, I input all the participant data into Excel to analyze the specific challenges and mindset shifts of each participant. This also enabled me to assess the specific participant responses against each of the demographic variables and to look for outsized impact among them.

I used memo writing (Saldaña, 2011) and discussions with my advisors to continually explore the information that was being gathered. This process led to me reframing my purpose statement several times. I initially framed the purpose of this study in my IRB application as “to study the ways in which onboarding into an SMO is experienced as more challenging than onboarding into a traditional organization." However, a review of the participant responses revealed that, despite being prompted to contrast with their previous experiences in traditional organizations, participants chose to speak mostly about their experience at the SMO. Therefore, we decided to refine the purpose statement to focus on "study[ing] the experience of onboarding into a self-managed organization (SMO)." Writing Chapter 5 provided additional clarity on the key insights of this study, which ultimately led to a reframing of the purpose statement as "to study the learning required to onboard into a self-managed organization (SMO)." This further focused the inquiry on the participant learning, which was at the heart of the findings that emerged.

Ethical Considerations

Social scientists have a significant ethical obligation as they delve into the private lives of others and therefore must ensure that the rights, privacy, and welfare of their participants are not endangered (Berg, 2009). For qualitative case studies such as this one, the risk of potential harm to participants was low. However, careful considerations were still made to ensure safety during the research process, as well as after the research is completed and published. During the research process, it was important to be sensitive to participants' emotions and needs. As described by Seidman (2006), in-depth interviews may bring up "areas that cause emotional discomfort for the participant" (p. 64). Upon publication, there is also the risk that participants can be vulnerable to embarrassment and loss of reputation (Seidman, 2006). This is especially true in the case of this research, where participants were asked to share their experiences onboarding, which included stories of tension and conflict. Moreover, some participants may feel embarrassed about their challenges, or worry that it makes them appear less able or competent.

To mitigate both risks and any other unintended consequences, I adhered to the process outlined by the Teachers College Institutional Review Board. Moreover, all participants were volunteers who were informed about the study's process and signed an informed consent form prior to participating.

Furthermore, all the data generated throughout this research project was kept within a safe location in my office and within a password-protected online database. As I knew the names of the participants, true anonymity was impossible (Berg, 2009), but full effort was made to ensure confidentiality through the use of pseudonyms and the sharing of a “composite picture” (Creswell, 2007) wherever possible. Furthermore, within the focus group, participants were asked to commit to a confidentiality agreement (Berg, 2009). Lastly, I committed to shredding or deleting all personal data three years after the completion of this research project.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Qualitative research is based upon data collected and interpreted by the researcher. Thus, trustworthiness—establishing that the data are honestly and accurately reflecting participant perspectives and realities—is critical. However, unlike quantitative research, with qualitative studies there are no recipes that can be followed to guarantee valid conclusions. As argued by Maxwell (2005), “the validity of your results is not guaranteed by following some prescribed procedure” (p. 105). Qualitative research is inherently subjective, and therefore there can be no guarantee of objectivity. However, I did strive to be as objective as I could. As Maxwell describes, “Validity is the goal rather than a product” (p. 105). This was achieved through continually seeking to mitigate any potential biases throughout each aspect of the study—a process that will be further elucidated below.

Considering the differences between qualitative and quantitative research, many object to the use of quantitative research terms such as *valid* and *reliable* and use *credible* and *dependable* instead (Bloomberg & Volpe 2008). I have thus chosen to use the terms *credibility*, *dependability*, and *transferability* to explore each of the different facets of trustworthiness.

Credibility

Credibility (or validity) is defined by Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) as: Do “participants' perceptions match up with the researcher’s portrayal of them” (p. 77)? As described by Maxwell (2005), two threats to the validity of qualitative conclusions are the “selection of data that fit the researcher's existing theory or preconceptions and the selection of data that 'stands out' to the researcher” (p. 108). Both of these are illustrations of researcher bias. In the words of Bloomberg and Volpe (2008), as a researcher you are the “research instrument” and therefore must be sensitive and aware of the biases you bring. While researcher bias can never be eliminated, it can be mitigated through awareness.

Another strategy to increase credibility is to deliberately attempt to disprove your finding. This process was described by Maxwell (2005) as using “the validity threat”; that way you can test your account against the external world, with validity being the result of ruling out alternative hypotheses (p. 106). In addition, triangulating your data with multiple sources can also help increase credibility, as can ensuring there was a clear logic linking the purpose, conceptual framework, research questions, and methods selected. This approach is described by Yin (2003) as the “use of multiple sources of evidence, in a manner encouraging convergent lines of inquiry” (p. 36). Maxwell (2005), however, notes that since multiple sources can share the same potential for bias, “in the final analysis, validity threats are ruled out by evidence not methods” (p. 112).

To enhance the evidence of credibility or interpretive validity (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008), I utilized several steps. First, I endeavored to ensure that all the assumptions and processes through which interpretations were made were clearly recorded. Second, as recommended by Creswell (2007), I went through a peer review process in which the study's assumptions and interpretation were tested; namely, through the process of submitting the dissertation proposal and dissertation defense. Third, I aimed to articulate my potential biases. This process is described by Creswell (2007) as "the researcher comments on past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations that have likely shaped the interpretation and approach to the study" (p. 208). Lastly, I shared key themes that emerged from my analysis of the interview with the focus group members for feedback and reactions. This provided an additional perspective and helped verify if the themes that were identified resonated with others who had experience within the same contexts as my participants.

Dependability

Dependability is described by Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) as: Can one "track the processes and procedures used to collect and interpret the data" (p. 78)? This helps ensure that the researcher's process can be replicated by others seeking to study the same phenomenon. I utilized several strategies to ensure dependability. The first was the use of rich detailed thick descriptions (Creswell 2007) and verbatim transcripts (Maxwell 2005). In addition, all the processes, coding schemes, and categories were clearly documented. These strategies helped establish a clear "chain of evidence" (Yin 2003) that other researchers can follow.

Transferability

While generalizability is not the intended goal of qualitative research, this study can still have broader meaning beyond these specific cases studies discussed. As Maxwell (2005) argues, qualitative research can have “face generalizability” when there is no reason not to believe the same result can apply more broadly. This was especially true in the case of this study, as participants were sourced from four different organizations and ranged across industries, geographies, and cultures. Second, qualitative research can have theory generalizability, in which the theory that is developed can be “extended to other cases.” This has also been called “analytical generalization” (Yin 2003) and can apply to the conceptual framework and SMO onboarding model presented in this research. Lastly, when respondents themselves indicate that there are generalizable characteristics, or corroboration can be made from other studies, then the study's findings can be extended. I therefore endeavored to provide rich thick descriptions (Creswell, 2007) and an articulated theory that may provide relevance for a broader context.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations of this study include some that are common to all quantitative research and some that are unique to this study. While they cannot be eliminated, careful consideration had been given to articulate and mitigate these limitations. The first limitation common to all quantitative research is researcher subjectivity (Bloomberg & Volpe 2008). As I was the source of the data collection and analysis, my biases may have unduly influenced the research topic. In this study specifically, my own experience struggling to adapt within an SMO is worth noting. This experience brought with it perceptions and assumptions. To ensure that these would not unduly influence the study, I worked to verbalize and discuss my assumptions in my research notes and in conversations with my advisor.

In addition to making my assumptions explicit, I had my coding scheme reviewed by my advisors and included them in my appendices for review by the reader. In addition, I anonymized all the interview transcripts so that they could be coded blindly if additional review was needed.

Another limitation was the limited size of the sample. While generalizability was not the goal of this research, I provided rich descriptions and detailed context to help others judiciously make use of the findings.

Furthermore, this study utilized interviews as the primary source of data. While interviews can provide rich data, they are subject to recall, which is often inaccurate. To help participants recall their experience in richer detail, I provided advance notice of the subject of the interview and several prompts to help them prepare for the interview.

Lastly, some of the tensions that participants struggled with, or had to learn through, were subconscious or difficult to articulate. Thus, I strove to use prompts and active listening techniques to help participants express their experiences entering an SMO, where they struggled, and what they had to learn to be successful.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this research was to study 15 members who had joined an SMO to understand the learning that was required and what supported it. A conceptual framework for this research was devised from a review of the relevant literature. Fifteen interviewees were selected based upon specific criteria from across several organizations.

Multiple methods of data collection were used to collect contextual, demographic, and perceptual information, including a document review, interviews, and a focus group. Throughout the process, informed consent was solicited and confidentiality ensured so that this study adhered to proper ethical standards. Moreover, careful attention was paid to articulating and mitigating researcher bias and to laying out a clear process of data gathering and analysis to increase the credibility and dependability of this research.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to study the learning required to onboard into a self-managed organization (SMO). To understand this, a series of research questions was explored:

RQ1: How did participants experience their onboarding?

RQ2: What unique challenges were present onboarding into self-management, and where within the organization did those challenges reside?

RQ3: What kind of learning was needed to help new members meet these onboarding challenges?

RQ4: What was supportive to new members learning as they onboarded?

At the core of this exploration were 15 interviews with members from a range of SMOs. In addition, document review and a focus group were utilized to triangulate the findings. This chapter will provide an overview of the research participants and the key findings that emerged. As a modified case-study, the intent was not to focus on the specific experiences of each individual, or the organizations they came from, but rather on the collective experience of onboarding into an SMO. However, as nearly all the participants came from four organizations, some information about the organizations will be provided to illustrate the span and scope of SMOs and to provide more context for the themes and patterns that emerged. Pseudonyms will be utilized for the participants, people they reference, and the organizations they are a part of.

The key findings that emerged from the interviews were:

KF1: Formal learning enabled a quick grounding in the basic mechanisms of self-management.

KF2: All participants faced challenges applying the principles and practices of self-management in practice.

KF3: All participants had to learn to shift their mindsets in order to successfully participate in self-management.

KF4: Transitioning into self-management was a nonlinear process that unfolded over time. For many participants it began years before they joined an SMO and continued even after their formal onboarding period was completed.

KF5: Formal training supported instrumental learning, while mindset shifts were more supported by informal learning.

These findings are explained in detail in the rest of the chapter so that the reader can enter into the experiences of the participants. The rich descriptions are also intended to enable the reader to actively engage with the study and research findings. Moreover, illustrative quotations from the interview transcripts are utilized to bring the participants' own voices into the discussion and to highlight some of the nuances and complexity of their experiences. Since for many of the participants English is a second language, the grammar and syntax of the quotations are not always correct. However, effort was made to retain participants' original phrasing, with additional clarification added only when necessary.

Demographics

As described in Chapter 3, a purposeful sampling was utilized to solicit participants who (a) have had prior experience working with a traditional organization prior to joining an SMO and (b) have joined an SMO within the past two years. Outreach was predominantly conducted through referrals from my own network, targeted emails, and Linkedin messages. Specific effort was made to direct the outreach toward a range of industries and geographies to broaden the base of experience.

Prior to beginning the interview, participants completed a short demographic questionnaire. The results of this questionnaire are listed in Table 4.1 below. These demographics were used to support the findings reported later in this chapter and the analysis and interpretation that follow in Chapter 5. They are also intended to help bring the participants to life and to provide context for the findings without compromising confidentiality.

Table 4.1

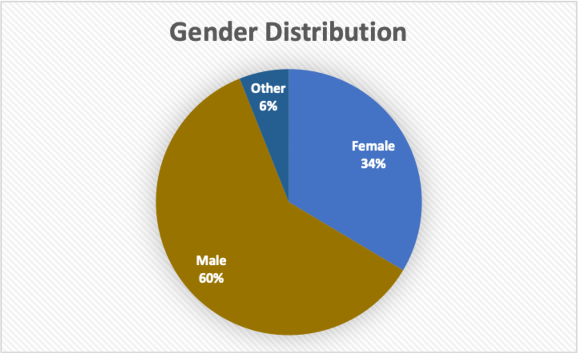
Participant Demographics by Alphabetical Order

Name (Pseudonym)	**Gender**	**Cohort**	**Education**	**Location**	**Age**	**Work Experience**	**Experience in an SMO**
Cory	Male	E-Controls	Bachelors	Europe	35-44	11-15 yrs	< 2 yrs
Gill	Male	CodeGeeks	Other	South America	34-44	6-10 yrs	2-5 yrs
Jane	Female	EarthCorp	Bachelors	North America	25-34	< 3 yrs	< 2 yrs
Kathy	Female	TalentGrow	Bachelors	North America	25-34	< 3 yrs	4-6 months
Lisa	Female	TalentGrow	Other	North America	25-34	11-15 yrs	< 3 month
Lowy	Male	CodeGeeks	High School	South America	25-34	6-10 yrs	< 2 yrs
Nick	Male	E-Controls	Bachelors	India	25-34	6-10 yrs	2-5 yrs
Rob	Other	EarthCorp	Masters	North America	>50	20+ yrs	2-5 yrs
Roger	Male	CodeGeeks	Bachelors	South America	25-34	< 3 yrs	< 2 years
Ron	Male	TalentGrow	Masters	North America	35-44	20+ yrs	7-12 months
Sam	Male	EatherCorp	Bachelors	North America	35-44	16-20 yrs	7-12 months
Tim	Male	E-Controls	Masters	Europe	25-34	< 3 yrs	7-12 months
Victor	Male	E-Controls	Masters	Europe	25-34	< 3 yrs	7-12 months
Violet	Female	TalentGrow	Other	North America	25-34	< 3 yrs	7-12 months
Willow	Female	Other	Masters	Europe	35-44	11-15 yrs	< 2 yrs

As listed in the chart above, the interview participants spanned across a range of ages, locations, and experiences. However, there were some clusterings that are worth noting. Firstly, depicted in Figure 4.1 below, the participant sample did skew male, with 60% identifying as Male, 34% as Female, and 6% as other.

Figure 4.1

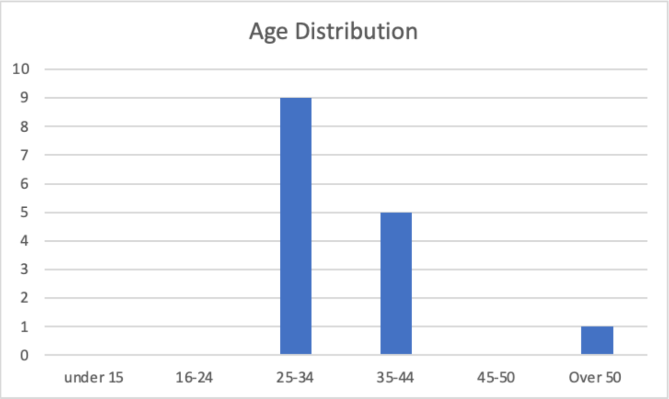
Gender Distribution



In addition, this group leaned young, with nine of the participants in the 25-34 year range, five participants in the 35-44 year range, and only one in the over 50 years old range.

Figure 4.2

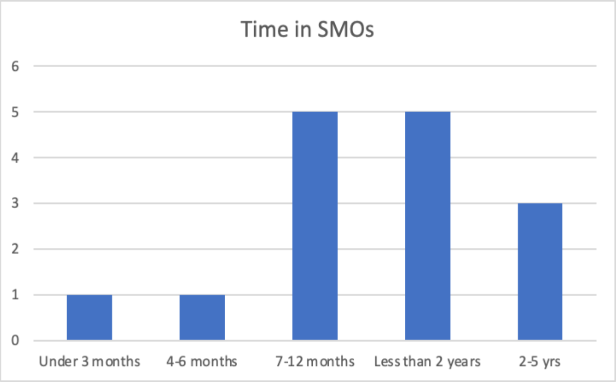
Age Distribution



Lastly, while I did target members who have been within their SMO under two years, by the time the interviews took place, there were three members who had gone over the two-year mark. As the only reason for that criterion was the assumption that newer members would have better recall of their onboarding, I decided to retain those participants in the interest of having a more diverse perspective. The majority of the participants (12/15) still met the original two-year criterion.

Figure 4.3

Time in SMOs

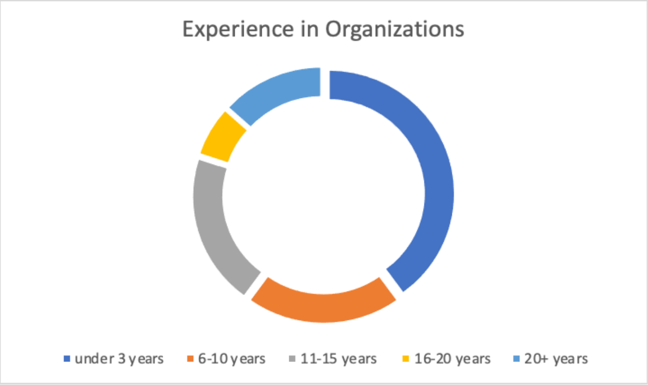


Also worth noting, none of the participants had experience across more than one SMO.

Regarding the other demographic variables, the results were more evenly distributed. Although 40% of participants were early in their career, the majority had more than three years of experience working in organizations. Moreover, 40% of the participants had over ten years of experience. This will be important to note, as more experienced members had some different struggles when onboarding into self-management. This is explored further in the analysis in Chapter 5.

Figure 4.4

Experience in Organizations



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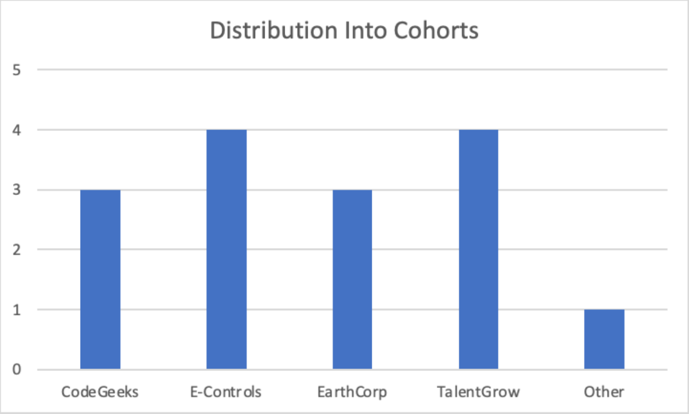
As I utilized a snowball sampling approach, it was not surprising that the participants also clustered into several organizational cohorts (shown in Figure 4.5). In addition to making it easier to solicit participants, snowball sampling also ensured that I had small groups of participants from several organizations. This enabled some intra-cohort as well as inter-cohort analysis, although the lens of analysis remained predominantly individual.

Figure 4.5

Participants by Organizational Cohort



Information the organizations participants were drawn from is listed in Table 4.2 below. These organizations span different continents, industries, and the ranges of development with their self-management practice. However, they did all meet the criteria for self-managing organizations (SMOs) as defined in Chapter 2—namely, granting full autonomy to members, having that autonomy be organization (or in the case of E-controls, business unit) wide, and having a formally documented self-management practice. (See Chapter 2 for more details on the different types of SMOs and key criteria they all share.)

Table 4.2

Organizational Information by Cohort

	Industry	**Size**	**Experience with Self-management**	**Notes**
CodeGeeks	Software	Around 100 members	Around 15 years. Well defined and codified systems and processes.	Founded as an agile focused company. Evolved into an SMO.
E-Controls	Engineering	80-100 members and growing	Around 4 years. Systems and processes solidifying and being codified.	A semi-autonomous business unit within a large 20,000 person organization.
EarthCorp	Agriculture	Under 10 members	3-4 years. Systems and processes are still being developed and adapted.	A farmer owned cooperative whose employees utilize self-management.
TalentGrow	Staffing	Over 400 members	Around 5 years Well developed and codified systems and processes.	Transitioned into self-management after over 60 years as a traditional organization.
Other	Non-profit	100-200 members	Around 4 years. Still solidifying their practice.	Utilizing the Holacracy model of self-management.

Key Findings

The purpose of the following section is to provide the key findings that emerged from an in-depth analysis of the participant interviews and document review. Rich quotations are utilized to bring the participants' voices to the reader and to highlight some of the nuances of their experience.

Finding #1

Formal learning enabled a quick grounding in the basic mechanisms of self-management.

Based on participant interview responses and a review of publicly available materials, there were significant differences between the participants' onboarding experiences. These differences seemed to correlate with both the size of their organization, as well as how long they had been practicing self-management. At one end of the continuum were participants from EarthCorp, where onboarding was still makeshift and improvised. At the other end were participants from TalentGrow, which had a curriculum, support roles, and a phased process.

For participants from smaller SMOs, onboarding was often ad hoc—as was the case for Sam, who got hired after a previous applicant suddenly quit:

> My onboarding was very rushed. And it was probably not ideal. Oh, it wasn't ideal for me. I don't think it was ideal for Larry or the other fellow who's onboarding me, because it was just kind of spur of the moment. Here's a body. Let's show them what we're doing as we do it.

Tim, too, had a chaotic onboarding experience, which motivated him to participate in the team that was trying to improve it for future hires: “It was the Wild West when I started ... yeah, that was horrible.”

Another factor that limited onboarding was an emphasis on technical learning at the expense of self-management. This was significant, as within an SMO every member ostensibly has two jobs: the specific role they were hired to do and the shared responsibility to help steer the organization. Onboarding that was too focused on the particulars of a specific role, or job, neglected to adequately cover how to participate in self-management. As described by Cory,

> [M]ore focus on this, education and self-management. That's what I have been trying to do. Because I think, even though I had some great discussions with my onboarder, we didn't touch that much upon this self-management. I was more focused on how to learn the products and the technical stuff.

These sentiments were echoed by Victor, who also longed for more support around self-management processes and terminology, which he differentiated from the "technical project itself." Moreover, even when some formal training on self-management existed, it was not always substantive, as described by Willow, who shared that she had only "two or three short trainings" before she was "living it."

On the other hand, other participants had a much more comprehensive and structured process. As participants' experience of their onboarding's robustness was closely correlated to their organizational affiliation, I have summarized some of the key influential factors by organization in Table 4.3 below. The formalization of training and curriculum and dedicated onboarding roles were factors likely shared by many developing organizations, while the phased approach to membership was unique to SMOs. Therefore, more attention is paid to a phased approach to membership in the subsequent paragraphs.

Table 4.3

Onboarding Processes by Organization

Organization	Phased approach to membership	Formal self-management training and curriculum	Dedicated onboarding roles
CodeGeeks (Gill, Roger, Lowy)	Yes	Yes	Yes
E-Controls (Tim, Nick, Victor, Cory)	No	In development	In development
EarthCorp (Sam, Rob, Jane)	No	Limited	Not in practice
TalentGrow (Kathy, Lisa, Violet, Ron)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Other (Willow)	No.	Yes	No

Phased Approach to Full Membership

Rather than being thrust into the responsibility of helping to steer the organization, some had the opportunity to gradually broaden their sphere of involvement. This gradual experience of participation happened both by design, as well as by happenstance. For participants in TalentGrow and CodeGeeks, this period of limited membership was by design. Every new member within these SMOs goes through an "aspiring" phase before passing through the threshold into full membership. According to CodeGeeks, "newcomers still do not decide on critical business issues. They need to soak up our culture, focus on the project and show that they are interested in participating in the management." This also gave new members time to learn all the self-managing practices before they were asked to apply them, particularly those practices that were unique to SMOs. For example, Violet differentiated between the self-managed approach to “feedback, compensation, [and] role advice” and standard promotional practices, which “we don’t do.”

A phased approach was experienced positively by the participants in this study. As described by Lowy, this gave him a chance to focus on “getting set up” in his “day-to-day” work before having to get into the “fine details of actually managing a company.” He shared that considering the amount of new information, if he had to join as a full member right away, “it would be a mess.”

In addition to staggering the amount of information and learning participants had to assimilate, this phased approach also enabled a period of evaluation. This was a two-way process, during which both the participant and the organization decided if they wanted to proceed to full membership. According to Violet, this included a holistic discussion, which explored new members' experience with self-management and their place within the organization.

Additional staggering was experienced by participants who first began working within their SMO part-time before becoming full employees. Kathy noted,

> I also did start as a contractor and then I became permanent. So I think there was also a difference there. Like someone who was permanent from the beginning ... probably have a different perspective than I do.

Contractors are usually not members of an SMO and have therefore neither the rights nor responsibilities of governance. However, for those who transitioned into full membership, their time as a contractor afforded an opportunity to learn about self-management from a distance. Ron first worked as a freelancer for several years before transitioning to full membership. He explained,

> Onboarding in was definitely a different scenario. I kind of [already] had some idea of some of the practices that the company used. Never practiced them myself, never really saw them in action. More just like, on a conceptual level, I knew what they were.

Tim, had a similar phased experience as an intern, which he credits helped his onboarding.

> I basically started with an internship, which was two days a week. And then which transitioned into a student job, which then transitioned into full-time. So, it was like a nice, slowly ramping up transition.... And by the point I was working full-time, I had 80%-90% figured out.

Formal Self-management Training and Curriculum

Classes and a formal curriculum was another area where members had a range of experiences. While for Willow, as noted earlier, these classes were very limited, for others they were significant. Roger described "around 10 classes" that were rich and meaningful, focused on "the way they work, and to understand to get along with other teammates that are newbies as well."

Without such training, new members had to learn the processes while trying to participate in them. This created extra strain, particularly as full engagement is expected within an SMO:

> I would have wished that I had been introduced to how we run meetings [before I participated], because when I see it now [in hindsight], it would not have been such an [difficult] experience. If I had known that I should call a proposal, that there would be clarifying questions, there will be a reaction round. And then there'll be this constant objection round. So, that could really have helped me. Yeah, learning the hard way. (Cory)

A similar sentiment was shared by Sam, who spoke to the value of practicing the governance process in a safe environment prior to having to bring forth an actual proposal:

> To have my idea put out to the team, and I'm the one who gets to decide on it. That was huge. But I've never experienced anything like any of this. So having a trial or just being able to do a mock up would have been nice.

Specific Roles Dedicated to Onboarding

Here, too, there was a range of experiences among participants. When present, there were two kinds of roles that were described. The first was an onboarding team role, which was mostly focused on supporting the initial steps members needed to get started in their jobs. According to

Lowy, that included technology setup, getting new members set on a work project, and checking in on how they were doing.

The second was the onboarding buddy or mentor role. This was a specific person who provided 1:1 support and guidance as new members acclimatized to their SMO. While the onboarding team role was mostly focused on providing technical and logistical assistance, onboarding buddies seemed to provide a far broader range of support. Violet explained,

> You might have a work buddy. That's somebody that's going to help you train, teach you, be a resource person for work-related ... she would check in with me saying, “Do you have a question about that or I notice you haven't done that one yet. Let's review it together.” And really coach through all of the process and the practice.

Participants' lived experiences with their onboarding buddies varied. While some found them very helpful, including Violet and Lowy, who described his buddy as “great,” others did not. Jane thought they had someone in the buddy role, but shared that “to be honest, we don't see or hear from him very much.”

Finding #2

All participants faced challenges applying the principles and practices of self-management in practice.

Despite significant differences in participants' formal onboarding, there were some important commonalities between them. These patterns carried across all organizational contexts. One important commonality was: while all participants reported many benefits from their experience with self-management, they also all reported personal struggles. These struggles impeded their ability to fully participate, even when they understood the processes involved. A second commonality was that nearly every participant reported organizational challenges with self-management that impacted them and their role. Both challenges are described in more detail below.

Personal Struggles with Self-management

While a self-managing organizational structure can create opportunities for its members, it can also present some unique challenges. As explored in Chapter 2, the literature suggests that these challenges can include psychological, biological, developmental, cognitive, social, and organizational obstacles. Although too small a sample size to be comprehensive, this study's participants did surface some of these challenges in their interviews, and they clearly played an important role as they sought to onboard into an SMO.

The challenges identified by the participants can be divided into two general categories. The first consisted of personal challenges participants grappled with as they sought to lean into self-management. The second consisted of organizational challenges, which impacted them in their roles. Several personal challenges were common across participants. These are summarized in Table 4.4 below and further elaborated on in the following paragraphs.

Table 4.4

Personal Challenges with Self-management

Specific Challenge	Percentage of Participants
Shouldering the weight of the responsibility	33.3%
Facing fear of judgment. and unacceptance by the collective	40%
Navigating informal hierarchy	46.6%
Finding confidence in themselves and their value	53.3%
Finding path forward without guidance	53.3%
Overwork	33.3%
Cognitive overwhelm	33.3%
Prioritization.	46.6%

Shouldering the Weight of the Responsibility. The empowerment that SMOs offered came in parallel to increased responsibility. This added responsibility was difficult for some new members, as they had to grapple with things they had been shielded from in the past. Victor pointed out,

> It's scary, you know, and power inherently is not scary, but it's the accountability that comes with it. Because now, you are the one who's taking the risk. Because earlier, it would be a manager who's like "shielding you" you know what I'm saying, but [now] there are repercussions for your actions, both good and bad.

This sentiment was echoed by Lisa, who also used the term "scary" when describing how she felt as she began to internalize self-management:

> Our CEO ... was like, "Here, I want you guys to think of yourselves, folks, to think that you are the CEO of your role." And I was like, "Woaaah!" ... But I think that was something that is empowering and motivating, but also like scary, because it means that you have so much freedom *and* [emphasis added] responsibility in your role.

Increased responsibility often came at a cost. This included the added "risk" mentioned by Victor. This was also emphasized by Rob, who argued, "I'm not really a fan of youthful idealism. I don't think they actually understand the work that's required in a distributed leadership. You're on the hook like, there's no place to hide."

This added responsibility took many forms. One was having to attend to unexpected issues outside of one's immediate role:

> Sam: [W]hen problems arise ... so I'm the one who has to solve the problem. It would have been great to just be like, "Hey, boss, this is going on. I got to go back to work. But can you look after this?"
>
> Yehudi: Right, it's a trade off on some level.
>
> Sam: Absolutely. Yeah. You can[t] always pass the buck off if there's no one to pass the buck to.

Another aspect was being challenged to speak up. Asserting one's needs, especially for those used to asking for permission, was difficult for some. Lisa recounted. "It's a little bit harder now [that she is in an SMO]. Because it's like, oh I have to just tell you. I almost feel it is *too* bossy [emphasis added].”

Another area where participants felt the added responsibility more acutely was around financial decisions. This was especially true when their decisions impacted other members' livelihood. Lowy shared,

> So everything regarding handling money was pretty intense for me, right? I felt that pressure if I made a wrong choice ... the first meeting that I had on that, I remember, I felt horrible ... there was a guy that just wasn't progressing in the way that it was expected ... It was like, no way. No, this person cannot get a raise this meeting.... And that's something that is decided by consensus.... So everyone that joins the meeting, can express their opinion.

As this was the first time he had sat in a salary review meeting Lowy struggled with having that kind of power over another member. Even though he accepted the rationale of the committee, which decided not to approve the raise, the emotional burden still weighed on him.

> So the rationale was, "Hey, this guy is not making progress here.... So we don't think we can give him a raise on this opportunity.... But I remember deciding on that. How to say "okay?” I felt terrible. I feel like "Wow, this guy is going to hate me or he's going to hate everyone."

Managing conflict, was another area where the added responsibility was more salient for new SMO members. This contrasted with their experience within traditional organizations, where issues can be passed to a manager to resolve. According to Jane,

> [I]f we had issues, [in her previous job], we could bring it to our manager and things like that, and she would take care of it. So, it did create a little bit more of a sense of camaraderie and safety in that sense. Whereas with self-managing you do want everything to be out in the open ... if you have issues, that like needs to be brought out in the open and like dealt with immediately and things like that.

Having to deal with issues herself was difficult. Jane shared, “I think, for me, at my stage, where I was at the beginning [it] felt very intimidating. Because I don't want to come in and I don't know, step on people's toes.”

In totality, all this extra responsibility meant that for many participants, self-management was much more challenging than a traditional role. When asked if part of him wished he had a boss, Tim said, “Yeah, because it's easier. Like, you just have a person to go to complain about things if something doesn't work.”

For some, the weight of all this extra responsibility was not worth the reward. Ron’s friends were terrified by self-management.

> [B]ecause they like, you know, being able to go into work and give a secret middle finger to their boss and do their job and go home at the end of it. And there's nothing wrong with that, you know. Like, but it's not quite the same when you're making decisions, sometimes big decisions about yourself and your team and your company.

However, for Victor this extra responsibility was an exciting opportunity to develop a wide array of skills. He argued that in an SMO, traditional management skills are required by all: “The self-managed employee has managerial skills. That is the skill of the manager [from] before needs to be transferred to the people ... because you're leading yourself.”

Facing Fear of Judgment and Unacceptance by the Collective. Although called *self*-managing organizations, SMOs are usually very collectively oriented. This is often due to their participatory governance and distributed leadership. Kathy recounted,

> As much as it's called self-managed, there's a lot of words of like self-responsibility, self-accountability, all of that. I've always seen it as a group effort though. It's never really just about you and what you're doing. No matter how much it's self-managed, it’s really about how the whole group holds you accountable and it's always like a group-involved thing.

The critical role the group plays in an SMO can be a double-edged sword. While the collective nature of an SMO was generally supportive, for some it also amplified fears of judgment or unacceptance that are often present in group settings. This was in part caused by the important role of the group within an SMO. Unlike in hierarchical organizations, where you just need to get approval from a single boss, within an SMO you often need team consent. Lisa described, “I don't have just one person having a say on my work, like everyone has a say on what everyone does ... so I think it's, it's more pressure for sure.”

Moreover, in order to enable collective decision-making, many SMO processes require members to make their thinking public. For some participants, this pushed them into uncomfortable levels of vulnerability. According to Violet,

> Thinking about something and then posting it out in the open for people to basically comment on it ... there is fear associated with that. Which is like psychological safety, or it’s the fear of looking stupid. Like who knows, maybe there's already somebody working on that or maybe there's a group actually that it's their job and now you just call them out in front of everybody. So like you never know.

Kathy also experienced the extra anxiety generated by having to make her thinking public and described some of the specific anxieties it evoked:

> There's like 500 people's eyes on your message, right? I think that's where my anxiety comes from. Because it's so involved with everybody else, it feels like there's too many eyes sometimes on your proposals or whatever you're saying. I guess you also do get that fear that you don't want to say the wrong thing or suggest the wrong.... You don't want to look dumb or like that you don't know what you're talking about when there's so many eyes on you. I think that's where my anxiety comes from. It’s like saying the wrong thing.

For some participants, the governance process itself also increased these feelings of vulnerability and judgment. This was the case for Cory, who felt pressed to defend his proposal in front of the group. Although ostensibly in the midst of exercising his power to propose, Cory felt more frustrated than empowered. “It was a bit of frustration, and yeah, I definitely didn't feel this empowerment. And so, it was, I would call it a bit of a shock. So yeah, I was a bit scared actually after that.” Cory had these feelings of discomfort and fear despite only getting positive feedback. When probed for the source of these feelings, he shared that he “was a bit overwhelmed by these questions and ... I felt I had to defend myself and defend my proposal.”

Not wanting to let the group down also increased the pressure people placed on themselves. This reinforced the paradox mentioned earlier; being in an SMO was both more and less supportive. When asked “if she was working harder than when she had a boss,” Lisa replied,

> [Sighs] Great question. Yes and no ... because I had a boss and you knew someone was peering over you. It's like, okay, I do have to get this work done. But I think it's now like less pleasing my boss, but pleasing my co-workers a little bit. And I think that's something I need to work on. But it feels like I'm impacting more people now. So I think there's an extra increased responsibility, because it's like, I don't do this work that's gonna have a ripple effect on other people.... And so I think it does make me work hard. But at the same time, it's motivating because it's like "we're in this together. We're a team like we're here about empowering and encouraging each other." ... I do think it is a bit more pressure.

Moreover, when holding themselves accountable, some members were much harder on themselves than a boss ever would be. Jane explained,

> [S]ometimes if people feel like they made a mistake or failed, they can kind of just really publicly feel very sorry for it and be very apologetic ... because they're not going to receive like, punishment or something from anybody else. They kind of publicly inflicted on themselves. And I think I could relate to that feeling.

The desire to be accepted and thought of positively by the group did at times also constrain how members exercised their authority. This is noteworthy, as one of the promises of self-management was that members would be free to make the choices they need to take care of themselves and advance the organization. In practice, however, attending to the collective created its own layers of complexity. Lisa noted,

> And so it's really up to us, our freedom and responsibility to bring it [vacation proposal] up to my immediate team.... At the same time, no one can be. “No, you can't take it”, but they can voice their thoughts and concerns ... even though I know they don't have power over me. But it's still a little weird.... Because you also don't want to go into that thing of being that person that always takes time off.... So yeah. [Chuckles softly]

Furthermore, for some members, the collectivist bent of their SMO challenged their personal dispositions. Self-management often requires members to proactively reach out to others to solve problems. That kind of outreach was challenging for more inverted members. As described by Tim,

> I was very reserved and shy. And I only slowly started speaking to more and more people, but I was only working with one or two people, right, but no one else was in the office. [Due to COVID]. And just being there twice a week, you don't really talk to them. Some of them are a bit more extroverted. So, they come up to you and talk to you so you know you can talk to them.... I was just so scared. So, it was tough.

A similar feeling was shared by Jane, who described some of the specific fears she had having to reach out to others:

> I don't want to be a bother. I don't really know always how appropriate it is. I think that in general, I don't struggle to make friends outside of work. But within a working structure, I keep things a lot more professional. And so, to like, reach out to people, particularly in this type of organization feels a lot more scary.... I know these are professional relationships. I don't, I'm afraid to cross those boundaries, because I don't know if it's appropriate. Yeah, so I'd say, for me, that's what it is there.

These fears were exacerbated by the gender dynamics that Jane suspected played a role in her organizations: "And to be frank, there might be a part of it, where, like, most of the people in my organization are men, and I'm one of right now two women. And so that might be a part of it as well." Together, these concerns made participating in self-management more challenging. New members had to continually manage their relationship to the collective and the emotional angst that it evoked.

Navigating Informal Hierarchy. While formally flat, SMOs, like many groups, still had informal hierarchies new members had to navigate. One cause of these informal hierarchies was differences in experience:

> I think there's still quirks in terms of self-management in terms of yes, there's no managers, but at the same time, it's still hard for me to the concept that, someone who's executive VP, or director has been here for 20 years, is equally as someone who's been here for three months, I think that's a little different to me of, of course, I still think they have a bit of seniority. (Lisa)

> [How do] you have to treat the old people, like the founders or people that have been there for several years. Is their opinion better or more important, or can you argue with them? Or are you equals? (Gill)

Another cause of informal hierarchy was the uneven distribution of self-management knowledge and key roles. Willow made the point that while no one was "in charge," some people occupied key roles and therefore seemed to have more influence. For some, these differences led to some voices being more valued than others:

> So, in a lot of ways, we are self-managed, don't get me wrong, like, I could do whatever I want, basically, I'm very free ... but there are a lot of these implicit, like, it's this implicit authority that they [lead links of circles] all have. Well … basically, they say something and people just listen to them … they try not to, but their word weighs a bit more. (Tim)

This was especially true for participants whose organization had a founder who introduced self-management. Despite their best efforts, they still often had an outsized impact on the rest of the members. Victor told,

> For me, to have that authority figure still there, even though he or she does not have the title is definitely ... power. There's always like, oh, yeah, we should do this. And hey, what do you say? You know, this is still a little reminiscent memory of this person being the top guy ... it's not that these people also exert influence, you know, I mean, for sure there's a bit of that, but they're not going out of the way to shoot down your ideas, and drive the team forward. But there's still sort of pandering, you know, so you still used to be my old boss. And there's a bit of that.... But it also defeats the purpose of [a] Holocratic team, because then everybody needs to be equal.

To fully participate, new members had to overcome these informal hierarchies. This was particularly challenging when giving feedback. Violet described how "intimidating" it was to have to give feedback to someone who in "a regular organization would be considered a higher supervisor or higher level management." These perceptions of hierarchy were present for some participants, even when technically they understood that they were equal peers. This was especially true for younger members regarding age-based hierarchies:

> Kathy: I will also say, I think there might be like the age difference as well. I think the younger employees feel [they need] a little bit more validation and could want that

> approval from our team lead. Whereas, I've noticed like with my older colleagues, they kind of just do what they want....
>
> Yehudi: Right. So technically you're all equal, but on some level, it doesn't feel that way.
>
> Kathy: It doesn't.

Finding Confidence in Themselves and Their Value. To proactively assert their views and needs despite the power dynamics, potential judgments, and added responsibilities described above required a high degree of confidence. Roger pointed out,

> [W]ith self-confidence, you have other different behaviors, like being more active or proactive, and working on other things, collaborating with other people, to do or to commit to a specific goal. So I would say that probably that will be the thing that I wished to have earlier.

Finding this confidence was something many of the participants struggled with. In Violet's words, "I would say I'm gaining confidence and I'm nearly to the point where I could be okay to post the inkling that I'm confident about. But have I done one yet? Nope. Not yet." Old habits and mindsets continued to linger for some participants, making this especially difficult. As evidenced in the exchange with Kathy:

> Yehudi: So even though you think it's better for the company and as part of a self-managing like team, you have the power to propose that you're not sure if you really want to propose it?
>
> Kathy: Yeah. I feel like it's kind of—yeah, and again, I'm new so I feel like maybe not, it's not my place. My manager already kind of said no, I guess, or my team lead kind of said no already. So it's kind of like I don't know if I should like actually say it again or not.
>
> Yehudi: Right. Even though if she's not really your [manager]?
>
> Kathy: Yeah even though, yeah I know. It's weird, right? It's like a little bit getting used to for sure.

A lack of confidence was likely also a factor in members not actively making use of their authority and governance abilities:

> I have this hunch that there is supposed to be a lot more freedom than people are actually taking. Because I guess, in theory, you're allowed to change the description of your responsibilities or change maybe even the title of your role.... And that never happens, basically. (Willow)

> How to approach people in other roles that are affecting mine that I maybe don't understand or disagree [with] and I maybe should be confronting them about that. And even though it's been explained what the technical process is to have these conversations, I am not confident in doing that. You know, like, I’m not confident in how to express that.... It still feels tricky for me. (Jane)

Another tension that was experienced was between trusting one’s own perspective and asking others for input. To be successful, new members had to find the right balance between both polarities. Lisa described,

> [A]nd when you make decisions without them. You're not being a good CEO of your role. Like how much are you managing that freedom responsibly? So I think it's definitely that I think of just not knowing if I'm making the right decisions, not knowing if it's impacting my team or not, not knowing if I should ask for more. I kind of find that balance of like, knowing my worth and knowing myself, but also like valuing other people's opinions. It's one of the struggles, I think, and fears.

Furthermore, the ambiguous nature of an SMO made it hard for some participants to know if something fell within their purview or not. Although all members are empowered to pursue anything that would further the organization's purpose, this required a level of proactiveness that some struggled with, especially if it seemed like there was someone else more suited to deal with the issue. As expressed by Jane,

> I don't know, though, if it's actually, if it should be my role to address someone about how they're doing in their role. You know, it seems like that should be the role of the lead link, and not me.... I mean, there's a sense of it, where I'm just hesitant to you know, start that kind of conflict. And even when it does, I know, actually impacted me and I should be the one to initiate the process.... I guess, that's where I am stuck in a hierarchy mindset, you know, which is maybe just a limitation that I haven't necessarily overcome yet.

Cory, too, echoed the need to overcome the lingering effects of a hierarchical mindset and shared that it “actually took some time” before he realized he could just act without asking permission.

This challenge was compounded for those coming from more hierarchical regions. In addition to their previous work histories, these participants had to contend with mindsets and habits from their general culture:

> [I]n Indian culture, I can say the people are not that used to like working in a self-managed way. Like we are [used to]working under managers and managers are working under their managers. So, like we follow the orders or they tell us and then we do those things. But in a self-managed way, what is important is decision making. I can say so that is in our hands and sometimes it is a bit difficult (Nick)

Lack of Guidance. As members settled into their SMOs, the lack of guidance was another area where some experienced challenges. Unlike in a traditional organization, where one's manager is responsible for their growth, within SMOs people are left to chart their development on their own. Victor and Jane shared,

> It was hard, because you don't really have somebody to guide you, per se. I think when you're when you're young, and you're part of a new organization, you sort of want kind of hand holding, for lack of a better term, you sort of want to be guided along.... Like even while in school and stuff, you always had your teacher who you would look out to, probably not ask your peers for feedback. When you get to university, even then there is that culture, but then it's the teacher who's giving you the direction, right? So, for me, that was super hard to get used to. (Victor)

> I felt like at the beginning, I didn't have a lot of feedback coming to me with how I was doing, which initially did make me a little bit insecure....You know, like, I think it's just very reflective of me being the age I am with the experience that I have that I need to develop this, this level of self-confidence. Whereas I think others maybe this is not an issue for them at all. (Jane)

Moreover, most SMOs don't have a specific HR department whose sole charge is to provide care for their members. While there are specific onboarding roles, at times the fragmented nature of those roles can lead things to fall through the cracks:

> One thing that was interesting is that [the] typical HR function or purpose [for us] is being spread across different people. So we don't have an HR department. We do have people that can do the job and are certified, knowledgeable, in high level HR issues. But more day-to-day things, I feel that for a new hire, it might be hard to navigate, especially if you're going through things at the beginning of your employment life within the organization. You might get lost. (Violet)

Even once they learned the ropes, some participants craved more guidance to help hold them accountable and to help foster their growth. Tim shared,

> Sometimes I wish I had an immediate manager. Because I feel like I'm slacking a bit, I get a bit lazy. I'm not getting maybe pushed enough.... I have projects, and I keep the deadlines of these projects and all these things ... [but] I sometimes feel like maybe the key word would be wasted potential.... I'm just wondering, could I be doing more?... And it's just one of these criticisms that you always also see of self-management like, people need someone to push them a bit because you get comfortable and then you need someone to push you a bit out of sight outside the comfort zone so you perform at your you're at your best, and I'm just wondering, is this my best or could I be doing better if someone was like, micromanaging me a bit more?

While some participants experienced peer feedback, the lack of a direct manager made it more difficult for others to receive the performance feedback they desired. Nick argued,

> Ah, downsides of self-managed to be working in this field? I think we are like missing instant feedback that we used to receive. Like, because like, we are now working independently a lot. And now we miss those feedback that we receive, like direct feedbacks, or individual contribution feedback.

In addition, some craved more guidance to support all the personal development self-management demanded of them. Roger wished for more mentorship from within his organization: “Sometimes we feel we are lost or maybe we don't know which step we should take first. I believe, to have that kind of guidance [would] make things a little bit easier.”

Lastly, career development was another area where participants struggled to self-manage—particularly as the flat structure of an SMO can make it difficult to chart a career path. As described by Lisa,

> I think it is kind of hard ... because there is no moving up kind of thing. The whole growing up. How am I doing like growing a career professionally? We don't have performance reviews.... I'm doing a common practice next week to celebrate my great graduation from probation. And it's like asking different reflection questions on: How do I see my growth? and Where do I see myself? What have I learned? When to challenge me? So I think that's good. But I don't know if there are constant things that will happen in the future.

Overwork. On the other side of the continuum, from struggling to take up authority, was the struggle many members experienced of taking on too much responsibility. This pernicious aspect of self-management is one of the unintended consequences of collective responsibility and a sense of ownership. Sam expressed,

> I am more connected to work. It's more of a part of my life. And so having that hard stop, sometimes that's been a struggle with me. It's like, okay, the days I'm done work. Where maybe like, there's other aspects to the business that need to be looked at after that. Like things are always … there's more responsibility, but things are always moving. Where, I mean, for the most part, a restaurant opens and closes, and then your off hours are your off hours.... Now there's more of just ownership of your role and ownership of the company.

This sense of ownership manifested in several ways, including always feeling like there was more to do and the blurring of work life balance after hours. Further described by Sam,

> At the restaurants when it's busy you make money, right. But at the same time, I think most people were quite happy if it's a quiet Monday or Tuesday night and everybody just shut down. And everybody went home early ... [here] in the beginning, I was just always connected just because it was new. So, I caught myself always checking emails, I was checking Slack, always thinking about work.... I realized pretty quickly that it wasn't very sustainable to be just checking work all the time.

The tendency to overload was further reinforced by the collective nature of SMOs. This made it more difficult to assert boundaries, as members felt responsible to their peers. Ron pointed out,

> At a typical organization ... if there wasn't work to do, I wasn't feeling too bad about it necessarily. But in this organization, you kind of have a responsibility to everyone else. And you know, you can choose and people do like, you take an easy afternoon, like, absolutely. But ultimately, like, other people rely on what you do in this organization, and you have the choice and the power and arguably the responsibility to balance those things.... It doesn't feel like anyone is pushing me to do it. But I also am kind of aware that if I don't do it, probably no one will. And if I don't do it, it's going to have a negative impact on those people around me. And that's important.

This challenge was especially true for participants who struggled to turn down work that was required to further the organization's purpose. Their dedication and commitment also led to overwork. Nick explained,

> Nick: [T]he workload has increased a lot due to that. I believe, because there are multiple tasks and it's hard to say no, so that is one challenge I face. So, I can say that is my weakness because many things come on my plate and it's difficult to say no directly to those members....
>
> Yehudi: And so, when there's more ownership, people end up working harder....
>
> Nick: Absolutely, absolutely. I totally agree with you that, like the ownership has increased. That's why the work has increased and the load as well.

In addition to causing burnout, this overwork also raised significant moral questions. Should SMO members feel the level of ownership and commitment of an entrepreneur, while not actually legally owning or benefiting from the profits in the same way? Jane argued they should not:

> I had hit a level of burnout a while ago, where I'm like, I've seen other people work as hard as a CEO, and I could tell that that was destroying them.... So, I'd say at one point, I was working as hard as a CEO. And at this point, I am doing the best I can in the roles I have. But I have set that boundary for myself that I am no longer working as hard as a CEO, because that is detrimental to me.... I mean, one of the things is, each of us in our roles were encouraged to think like many CEOs, which is great in some aspects and another's, it's actually been terrible. I am paid [an employee salary] and having a business owner mindset for business I don't own. That's not my passion project, I'm not getting compensated like a CEO. I have struggled to maintain boundaries between thinking about work outside of work, and letting it continue to affect me and my mental health when I should be relaxing and thinking about something else. And that has really deteriorated my mental health in the last year or so.

Cognitive Overwhelm. Onboarding into an SMO involved the learning of many new processes and terms, alongside the details of a particular role. This additional load created strain for some participants, despite the organizational support that was in place. As described by Cory, “We say we have self-management, but we actually do have a lot of fixed processes. For instance, when running meetings, how do we run a meeting? So, this was quite difficult.” This same sentiment was echoed by Lowy, who recounted,

> So in total, it was a lot of information fast. I remember the first week, I didn't understand half of the processes that we have in place. Because we are self-managed you not only need to manage yourself and your time but also the rest of the company.

The rigid structure of many SMOs' processes also contributed to the initial confusion participants felt, as described by Willow, Rob, and Kathy:

> Also with how the meetings work, like the checklists is something that took a long time before I realized, okay, that's just a tool to help people think of if there's anything that they need to address. I thought we were just like going through that. And it was like, this really fast, why is nobody responding to it? Like, what's the use of the checklist? So that took a long time before I got that. (Willow)
>
> I mean, there's a ton of great resources out there, but to have someone actually use some of those tools, like retrospectives with GDMs ... there's been a pretty steep learning curve. (Rob)
>
> [E]verything had a structure and everything had a way of being done. Whether that be the conversations you have as a team, the agreements that you make with your team, GDMs, the six hats, like there's so many of those things that are so foreign to me. That's something that you don't really see in other organizations. It takes a long time to figure out what they all mean and to like do it properly. (Kathy)

For members coming from traditional organizations, all these very specific processes felt new and different. Moreover, they felt pressure to learn how to do them correctly. Kathy shared, "Things that are meant to be a certain way and if it's not done that way, it's kind of seen as like you're not doing it properly."

In addition to learning many new processes, members of an SMO often must juggle several roles throughout their time in the organization. This is because many roles—such as project management, hiring, strategy development, and financial oversight—are often managed from within the team. Nick argued,

> [T]he main challenge that I believe is, in this new way of working, we have many roles that we have to take care of right now. I personally have two roles. But hiring is one problem. Like, if we don't get the candidates, we are still stuck with those roles. And before delegating the previous role, we cannot switch to a new role. That is the challenge I face personally.

However, not all participants saw the multiple roles they had to juggle only as a challenge. Victor also saw them as an opportunity for continual learning and evolution:

> I think one thing that people can unlearn [coming into an SMO] is that they are specialists.... I mean, to define yourself with the identity as an engineer, or as a sales marketing guy, or whatever. I think that's something that people can choose to unlearn, you know, because our education is not strictly who we are. I mean, for sure, you might have taken it, because interests you, but I'm sure there's another thing that interests you. And that's a personal thing. It doesn't matter. It's very subjective. And because I think that the future belongs to the generalists.

While Victor was energized by this opportunity and his belief that "the future belongs to the generalists," it did add additional cognitive load that he had to manage.

Prioritization. One of the more significant challenges many participants experienced was having to prioritize their tasks and their time without managerial support:

> How to prioritize? You have this bunch of tasks, and yeah, which ones are the most important? That was also quite a big deal for me. And I also raised this tension of how do we prioritize, how do I prioritize because I don't have a boss or leader I can go and say, "Hey, which task should I do first?" (Cory)

This was especially true for participants who were new to the job they were hired for. They had to figure out on their own what to focus on and how to divide their time. Sam described time management as one of his struggles:

> [H]ow to manage my time, and where to budget my time because it was a completely brand new job, it is a brand new role ... just because it's self-management. I just kind of had to figure out myself how things worked best for me.

The boundless possibilities of self-management also presented a challenge. With freedom to do anything, Roger had to actually decide what he would focus on:

> And I, a couple of months ago, was realizing that I'm not working anymore in those [hierarchal] spaces. And I am freer with my time. I do have more control of my time; how do I manage my time? And what can I do? What can I not do? And so on. So I think that was the most challenging thing for me.

This challenge was compounded by some of the other themes we already explored above, such as balancing individual and collective needs, a tendency toward overwork, and cognitive overwhelm. As described by Nick,

> If we are working for [a] specific role, one role, then it's not a challenge. But we might have different roles under our like, circle. So, I'm fulfilling like, two to three roles. Also, I have an organizational role like a secretary, we have three roles, lead link, secretary and facilitator. So, I'm also the secretary of the circle. So, I have some accountabilities that I have to fulfill for that role as well. So that is challenging.

Maintaining boundaries and saying no to tasks, or needs, within the organization was another important aspect of prioritization. Jane learned that deciding which boundaries to maintain was often a matter of finding the right balance among many polarities; such as the tension between self and other, and personal and organizational needs:

> Potentially, you could really get pulled into one direction or the other.... So, you're kind of just in a silo pursuing what you think is best, and that's actually hurting other people, but you can't see that. Or there is, putting everybody else's needs before your own and completely, you know, sacrificing yourself to the business. And I think both of those are bad paths to take. (Jane)

While Jane ultimately felt positively about the boundaries she established, other participants were more torn. Gill wanted to be involved in more, while simultaneously recognizing some of his own limits:

> [A]part from my job, I'm attending college. And so maybe I'm too tired to be involved in the things that I get involved in, under different situations.... I didn't want this, you know, to be the person with more responsibility in a team. But it happened. So, I'm trying to learn something from this.... But at the other hand I wish I could be more focused on culture from time to time.... And I wish I could be working more actively and that's kind of tough. I just don't have the energy these days. But there's the opportunity and I would really love to be more involved than I am these days.

Organizational Tensions Participants Experienced

In addition to the personal challenges members reported, they also struggled with organizational tensions caused by self-management. These tensions are summarized in Table 4.5 below and then discussed further in the subsequent paragraphs.

Table 4.5

Organizational Tensions with Self-management

Organizational Challenge Experienced	Percentage of Participants
Ambiguity	33%
Lack of Accountability & Feedback	40%
Organizational Incoherence	60%
Slow Decisioning	40%

Ambiguity. For some participants, the lack of a formal hierarchical structure contributed to increased ambiguity, particularly regarding roles:

> [T]hat was very confusing for me.... I showed up for work every day, and I'm working with five other people, but I have no idea what they're doing. And so, it's without that structure, you know what I mean? Like the traditional corporate structure. (Sam)

This lack of structure also led some participants to suspect that members were taking on the wrong roles. Tim argued,

> Sometimes, it's not the right people. Like the roles are fluid, right? So maybe it's not the most qualified person doing whatever task there is to do it, but like, that's more of a thing that we have like a scrum team, where just anyone, it's like a free fall, basically, with the tasks. And sometimes I feel like it gets really chaotic about who does what ... sometimes there's just no structure.

Within the self-managing community, this ambiguity is sometimes mitigated by very explicit role charters. However, in the experience of some of the participants, these charters were not always kept up to date, leading to more confusion:

> I'm a very structured person.... I'm a person who like is constantly checking is this is what I'm doing? Also what's agreed upon?... So more, yeah, just some more focus or priority on that. Because it's just something nobody ever talks about that just [is] at some point settled [and not updated]. (Willow)

Yet, while disconcerting for some, the increase of organizational ambiguity was somewhat intentional. As pointed out by Rob, this ambiguity creates greater adaptability within the organization:

> [I]t's much more responsive.... I'm so adaptive. I've been farming for a long time. And so like, the natural world, you'll get hail, something happens, and then you have to respond ... we just started to get more conscious that we needed people that could be much more adaptive, and responsive to the [business] needs. And because we're a startup as well, like things are constantly changing. So, we needed somebody with that adaptability, that flexibility.

Lack of Accountability and Feedback. Another organizational tension participants had to navigate was the lack of feedback loops and accountability for themselves and others. Within an SMO, the onus of management is placed on everyone. Yet, when individuals fell short, participants struggled to know how to respond. Willow shared,

> With one of my projects, I am waiting for someone to do something for like really long, and because it's like, you're not allowed to communicate a deadline or to communicate when you're going to do something. That's supposedly not part of Holacracy from what I've heard, you know? So, that makes for me, it makes it more unclear. Like, there's more waiting.

While Willow was incorrect in her assumption that the Holacratic method doesn't allow deadlines (they just must be agreed upon), her experience of the complexity of holding others accountable within an SMO was echoed by others:

> [I]t can get, in some ways a little bit complex in when there is kind of tension or strife or maybe somebody's underperforming, it can get a little bit more-tricky to know how to address that because it is self-managing, and there isn't as much like oversight into exactly what everybody's doing. We don't want that. But then sometimes people who are not doing as well, whether that's because of their own mental health or what not, they're not doing as well, but people don't see it as readily because they're not being checked in on as much. (Jane)
>
> [Y]ou think about some of the worst-case scenarios when you're dealing with people who are underperforming or something like whose responsibility is it to talk to this person? Like, it's not obvious, because that person doesn't have a manager? You know, it'll be like, whoever is theoretically closest to that person's work. But who is that? (Ron)

The lack of clear feedback loops also made it harder for some participants to know themselves how they were doing:

> I had that initial unsureness if I'm doing things the right way, or I don't get to see every aspect of that role. So, I'm not sure if I'm doing it the right way without getting feedback. You know what I mean? So, there's that and just not being 100% aware of, in this new role, how it affects everybody else, or what everybody else is doing around me and how it affects me, but a little bit of unsureness up in the air. (Sam)

Violet pointed out that these issues were compound at scale:

> [W]hat if we become too big? Like right now, it's manageable with 300 or so people. But what if we get to 1,000 people? How are we tracking that things are being followed? How are we tracking that people that do—we don't terminate anybody—but still the contribution review can end up with somebody leaving or that the advice that somebody is giving is actually correct and always following the employment standards.

Organizational Incoherence. All organizations advance by balancing convergence and divergence (Dooley & Van de Ven, 2016). While the individual empowerment within an SMO can lead to more innovation, participants did find at times it came at the expense of organizational cohesion. As argued by Tim,

> A big issue of mine, actually, for a long time was there was no common ... vision ... playbook American companies, startups, tech startups, you have this visionary CEO. We don't have that. Like, the visionary CEO that gives everyone the same vision. So everyone is pulling into the same direction, you know. We don't have that.

As a result of not having a shared vision, participants reported challenges with prioritization and alignment. Tim described, “Some people think this more important, some people think that is more important, and then there's no one to overrule any of them.” This was especially challenging regarding coordinating work across teams. Cory shared,

> The biggest topic is prioritization. How do we prioritize and we are working in different teams?... So, I could have an issue with some product that need to be released, go to engineering, and engineering are always busy. And then I also always get the question “okay, I can take your task, but then you can tell me what tasks not to do?” I say, “I cannot prioritize your tasks. But I do know that I have an important urgent task here”. So, that's what we are really, really struggling with.

A simpler pattern was pointed out by Jane about large decisions that impact multiple roles:

> We're at a point where we need to make some really massive organizational changes, and it affects everybody. And because we're all impacted, and its multiple chains, multiple changes and multiple different levels, I think this type of structure has maybe slowed down that process and slowed down some changes that have really needed to happen and need to get going.

The lack of a clear shared vision also made it difficult for individual participants to know how to direct their own work:

> I would love to just come up with my own projects. And that's, I really enjoy having that freedom in that way. But I can't do that if I don't know what the umbrella kind of is. Where it's supposed to be under? (Willow)

Furthermore, the lack of a management cadre led to some participants feeling like important items that didn’t fit neatly within any specific roles were falling “between the cracks.” Violet explained,

> Sometime when larger scale projects are being done ... it could take longer or things are not getting to the finish line because it's nobody's real job and the project just falls through the cracks and [people] forget about it, kind of thing.

Kathy, too, experienced something similar trying to get agreement to purchase a specific piece of software. While her team lead tried to help her, ultimately she didn’t feel responsible to do so, and thus the issue remained unresolved:

> Like she left me on because I feel like—I mean she is really busy, but it's also like she doesn't feel responsible for me. Like answering every single one of my questions, it's not really like her job right. I always felt that way too. So it kind of just went undone like nothing really happened after that.

Another reason issues remained unresolved was when there wasn’t agreement or clarity within the team. As described by Lisa, “Yeah, so I think that's all-confusing like, okay, but I don't know what to do. And my colleagues also don't know what to do. So who will decide at the end of the day?”

Slow Decisioning. As a result of some of the abovementioned tensions, some participants felt that decision making was too lengthy a process. Lowy argued,

> Every time we need to make a decision. We go through several processes. Right, you get you to pitch the idea to someone, then you get validation, then you start building up like you prepare a slide, you prepare a topic like a dissertation, you present it to the team to the rest of the company in the monthly meeting, then it gets discussed. If everything goes well, then that begins our Lumia proposal that gets approved. And that's it. If something doesn't go well, you need to go and review the process and review the presentation. So I think for some decisions, it will probably be quicker to make it without it.

Even when technically a member had the authority to make a decision themselves, within SMOs there was often pressure to first get advice from others in the group—especially for larger decisions:

> You can make decisions on your own. But then there'll be repercussions that your teammates will be like, "Hey, what the heck, why didn't you include us?" Or why didn't you ask for feedback." ... but then that means that the whole process does take a while. It's not just a quick ... you can just do it. Sometimes it could take hours, sometimes weeks, sometimes months. And so because everyone has to be on the same page. Everyone has to agree. (Lisa)

However, participants made sense of this experience differently. For Lowy, the pros and cons of collective decision making balanced out, while for Cory, the decision-making process impeded agility to the extent that he said he would rather go back to a traditional hierarchical model. As he put it, "We try to say, hey, we are agile, we are quick at making decisions. I don't think we are." A similar sentiment was expressed to Rob during an exit interview when he was told they were "being too slow" and "being held up by this feeling of decision by the committee." Unlike Cory, Rob did not think the solution was going back to traditional management, and despite the feedback, he doubled down on "radical responsibility."

Furthermore, some participants and their organizations were actively working to develop their decision-making practice to account for some of these tensions, while retaining self-management. Gill explained,

> We are 80 people; some of our current decision processes are not really adapting to our current scale. So, it's something that we are talking about. And we have to decide what to do, how to keep on growing, if we want to keep on rolling, hire more people. The decision process may have to be split in different paths or something.

Across the board, participants struggled to manage personal and organizational tensions with self-management. While some of these challenges were mitigated by learning the mechanisms of self-management, many were not. Even participants from the most developed SMOs identified significant challenges they had to overcome. These findings were also substantiated by the focus group discussion. Participants noted that there was a significant gap between understanding self-management practices and actually utilizing them. They shared, that in their experience, for many new members it can take many months before they are able to fully embrace self-management.

Finding #3

> *All participants had to learn to shift their mindsets in order to successfully participate in self-management.*

In order to meet the personal and organizational challenges described above, participants had to engage in two very different kinds of learning. The first was instrumental (single-loop) focused on learning self-management processes, skills, and terminology. The second was focused inward, on transforming their mindsets and assumptions (double-loop).

A full accounting of all the instrumental learning participants went through during their onboarding is beyond the scope of this research. Some key areas have already been mentioned in previous sections, such as time management, prioritization, learning self-managing processes, and managerial skills.

It is worth noting that these learnings often blended together, as was the case for Cory, who had to learn the proposal process, time management, and prioritization all at the same time as he began to self-manage his work:

> I actually raised the tension that I had too many tasks. And that was at the time, I didn't know how to deal with these processes in meetings during meetings. And we have some called a rigid process for how to handle proposals. So, I was told that "hey, just come up with a proposal." And I thought, okay, I do that. And I made an overview of my own resources and said, okay, as it is for now, I'm actually booked the 130% with tasks. So, I came up with a proposal ... [and got lots of hard questions he was not expecting because he didn't understand the process].... Yeah, learning the hard way.

Double-Loop Learning

However, instrumental learning alone did not suffice. To fully engage in self-management, participants had to also change their mindset (double-loop learning). This was especially important, as in an SMO there are few structural constraints. It is members' own mindsets and assumptions that are often their most limiting factor. As argued by Victor,

> I think some people who join self-managed teams should take involvement, should take risks, should be willing to push the status quo, you know, because *it's all mental* [emphasis added]. You assume that is, you think that there's something holding you back, but in reality, there's nothing … there is no manager to hold you accountable, right. So, you need [to push] yourself.

While each participant had their own journey, there were commonalities between their mindset shifts. These themes are listed in Table 4.6 below and explored in the subsequent paragraphs.

Table 4.6

Common Mindset Shifts Identified*

From	To
Looking outside for approval and validation	Self-authorizing
Self-doubting and timid	Confident and trusting in value of their contribution
Limited sense of self and skills	Understanding of needs and grounded sense of abilities
Either/or thinking	Both/and thinking
Waiting for others	Proactive
Individualistic and opaque	Collaborative and open
Burning out	Valuing boundaries
Perfectionistic and performative	Learning oriented and humble
Fleeing conflict	Being OK with tension
Employee	Owner

**Note. Common* defined as shared by 20% or more of participants.

Self-authorizing. One significant mindset shift was learning to break free of the need for outside permission or validation, which, as noted by Kathy, are often the same thing:

> I think I've been so used to being told what to do in a workplace and seeking like approval, and in a weird way, like validation as well. Like you're always asking, "Am I doing it right? Am I doing it right?" I've realized that here, I was doing that too.... But then I realized like me feeling like I can hold myself accountable is what "Teal" [a self-managing approach] is.

For some, the first step in this shift was to become more conscious of the language they were using, as well as the assumption inherent within it. This often required outside feedback:

> At first, definitely, I was a little bit lost ... every time that I wanted to do something ... I was directly going with that person and asking that person, ... “Am I able to do it?" And that person was like, "Yeah, of course, you don't need to ask me, you, you can do it." ... I will say the only challenging thing was to break this barrier or to lose that fear of asking myself, "Am I able to do so or not?" (Roger)

> I'm learning to stop asking for approval.... I asked her, "Is it okay?" I sent a message, I was like, "Oh, is it okay?” ... And then she asked me to hop on a call and she lovingly provided me good feedback, but she was like, “You need to stop using words like ‘approve,’ And ‘is it okay.’” ... Yeah, I think that's the biggest learning. (Lisa)

Moreover, as part of this unlearning process, participants had to critically reflect on their previous work environments. As Roger and Kathy noted, their fear of disapproval was rooted in experiences from their past:

> I will say that it comes from my previous work experience and places where I probably have had some ideas, and I was asking, "I'm having this idea. Can we do it?" And some of the bosses or people that were managers of my area are just directly telling me, "No, we cannot do it, or we don't have the time or you just need to focus on your work and if you want to you can do it but do it after a work time. Or do it by yourself, not here inside of the company." So it was at certain points disappointing for me. So that's why I was somehow expecting rejection. But it hasn't happened yet. [Laughs softly] (Roger)

> [B]ack in my other organizations, that's how it used to be. Kind of reporting what you did, telling them how much work you got done, stuff like that. So that's something I had to unlearn ... and feel more confident in my own work instead of asking someone if I did it right. (Kathy)

To succeed in an SMO, participants had to unlearn these old behaviors as well as learn new ones. Victor explained,

> I think to unlearn this whole “I need somebody to guide me. I need somebody telling me what to do.” Nonsense! I think that's something that people need to unlearn to do better in the self-managed organization.

Once they were able to step out of these old mindsets and patterns, participants learned new ways to orient. Rather than look to their leaders for validation, or approval, they looked to the purpose of the organization for guidance:

> But now we are working for a purpose and if we are doing it for a purpose. So why ask for consent? And if we feel then there can be a different solution so we can readjust... So being challenged so many times, I became so proactive that I try to get those things done myself. Earlier, I was not used to doing those things. I was also into the same mindset, like getting approvals. (Nick)

Confident. Another closely related mindset shift was from self-doubting to confident. Regarding this shift, there were several shared themes. One pattern was learning to speak up and that their voice had value:

> I prefer to be a bit anonymous, but I've really learned how to speak up and not be afraid to come up with my opinion, and the people actually are listening and appreciate that. (Cory)

> This role has really helped me develop my own self-confidence. And so, at the beginning, I didn't have much of that. And I think that definitely played into it that I didn't trust myself in my own, like, thoughts and ideas and instincts. And so I was, you know, much more hesitant to speak up or, you know, give my opinion on things.... And I think I have developed that and I'm continuing to develop, learning to respect myself and advocate for myself, or for just the needs of the business or the company. (Jane)

> I was very like timid and like kind of like an introvert for sure too, but I've realized like me speaking up is what's going to get me stuff, like get what I want. I'm going to be able to succeed in this job is if I speak up and have my camera on and like people see my face like stuff like that. (Kathy)

> For sure. It's taught me to be more confident and be more assertive. (Victor)

This shift was reinforced over time. Each time participants spoke up, they developed additional confidence and motivation. Nick shared,

> [P]articipating in multiple meetings and speaking up there, that was not the case earlier ... these thoughts, like initially used to come, like whether I can raise this proposal or bring this tension to the circle, and how will it go?... So now as being a part of multiple circles and interacting with many different members. So that has boosted the confidence and it is a motivator to like go ahead and like to improve more on these things.

Positive results also reinforced new behavior, as described by Victor:

> It really boosts your confidence when things go right and people trust you ... like I told you, seeing the result of my efforts was just fantastic. It's a good feedback loop, increases my confidence and encourages me to try more.

Believing that their opinion mattered was an important component of this shift. This required a different internal monologue; one that saw their participation as a critical component of the collective process. Gill explained,

> You have like this internal process where you really have to assume that your opinion is part of the process of the decision process. Because when you start talking in a collective way, we're like singing out loud, sometimes. So, it's important to participate.

Challenging their own internal assumptions and limitations was another important shift, particularly around reaching out to others in the organization. Violet and Nick both shifted to a new mindset, which empowered them to cross-team boundaries in service of their organization:

> It can be intimidating but it's just the way it is and it works great still. I didn't have any negative experience regarding that. It's more about adjustment. No, you don't have to ask permission to email accounting ... learning to be confident in yourself and trusting yourself and getting over that imposter syndrome that some of us can feel. (Violet)
>
> So earlier, I was like, a bit afraid, like, you can say, like contacting new people.... But now I am like, I have made that mindset that I can contact anyone if it is for a purpose. And I can speak to any person who can help me with that. So, I have changed a lot ... that was out of my comfort zone and that I feel like I've achieved that. (Nick)

Achieving this new way of thinking required letting go of old fears and anxieties. This new mindset was powerfully described by Tim:

> I just decided to say, you know what, fuck that, I'm not thinking about this anymore. I just keep writing everyone every day, and someone will have time. So, I just completely dropped the ego in that respect.... Like, why would I be scared of that? And they will [tell me] if I push it too far.... But it never happens. They've never pushed back.

In addition, participants learned to believe in themselves and their ability to make a meaningful contribution. Kathy shared,

> I learned to not doubt myself and actually start taking on that responsibility, or not worrying so much about if I'm doing the job right. It's become more like, "No, you're

> doing it. It's fine." If it wasn't doing it, I would get feedback for it, which I haven't so it's fine.

However, this new mindset took time to be internalized:

> I think it's helpful to hear it again. I don't think I caught that at the beginning for sure.... I definitely think that was like a self-realization. Because again, I was so used to being in an environment that used to be like you had a boss telling you what to do or like a manager telling you what to do (Kathy)

Changed Sense of Self. Another significant mindset shift was around how participants viewed themselves and their value. Participating in a self-managing system, and seeing how others related to them, shifted how new members thought about themselves. Without a hierarchical structure to limit their work, some participants surprised themselves by what they were able to achieve. Roger described,

> What I learned about myself was that I was underestimating myself, professionally, I was thinking that I think that I'm good, but I'm not ... like a person who will work in San Francisco, New York, or some other big places, but I noticed that I have the capability and I have skills to work together with anybody around the globe.

Moreover, working closely with people across team boundaries helped participants like Ron recognize where they had something unique to contribute. This realization was reinforced by the peer-feedback culture within his SMO:

> One of the things that I learned at this company is those qualities that I have and their value ... the feedback and support and encouragement that I got ... from the people that I worked with, you know, the people that I talk to and in that way it feels all that feedback feels very organic, and it feels very, like it's not like a an employee recognition program where they do their monthly employee of the month or the week or whatever, it was, like very real organic appreciation. And I think that was a big deal for me.

In addition, being empowered to choose pushed participants to get clear on what it was they wanted. Cory explained,

> [I] definitely also learned how to again, speak up. Say "hey, what do I want?" "What kind of role could I see myself in?" Maybe not now, but in a few years ... learning how to speak up and say, "Hey, what do I actually want?"

Continually navigating different role boundaries also helped Jane see what she was good at. These learnings changed how she thought about herself and are something she is taking with her as she transitions out of her current role.

> [D]iscovering, like I mentioned, more of myself, and what I'm good at ... it has really helped me to learn to respect myself and my own worth, and lead with that when I'm looking at other jobs. So, it's helped me a ton in this other job that I've acquired, to say like, “This is what I bring to the table.”

Both/And Thinking. Another mindset shift of note was that of moving beyond “either/or” thinking (Johnson, 1998) into managing polarities. The complexities of working in an SMO required some participants to learn to balance across a continuum, shifting away from simplistic solutions on either pole. One such continuum was between innovation and stability, as described by Lisa:

> I am a very heavy innovator. I like change. I like doing things. I like being proactive and seeking out results in the best way, like being lean, maximizing value, and minimizing waste. So I'm always about like ... what can we do to make things better, and I kind of just do it ... through feedback. I've had a colleague reach out to me and tell me, "Hey, I think this is great. But also remember that you also need to focus on consistency," and trying to like the CEO, like remembering that it's like, yes, you have powers and you have a responsibility, but you also have to recognize the impact that that has on the rest of your team.

Another polarity was that between the view and needs of an individual role and that of the organization. Learning to hold both views and to find balance between them was part of the new mindset that Jane and Lisa described:

> Yeah, there's kind of this level of relationship to the work I'm doing that it's helped me to see and understand ... how the work I'm doing plays into the larger picture of the business, which helps me make better decisions for my role, to better impact the rest of business and how I work with others. (Jane)

> [B]eing more risk-oriented, visionary and less of those people-pleasing and accommodating ... at the same time do you want ... the perfect balance between accommodating and aggressive ... a team player because you’re all working together. (Lisa)

Violet also described having to learn to manage a similar polarity, between her own needs and the greater good. While she had the decision rights to make the call, she had to learn to consider the impact she may have on others:

> At the end of the day, you decide. Nobody's going to tell you what to do exactly, but you have to be careful about the decision that you're making. Because if it impacts negatively the organization, you might be asked to do a contribution review and your decision making might be put in question ... you always have to balance. Like you always have to put your business manager’s hat as well as your own personal employee hat and decide what would make sense. You really have to look within yourself and further down at your own need at the moment and think of the greater good as well.

A fourth polarity was finding a middle ground between hierarchical views of leadership and complete uniformity. While there is not positional leadership within an SMO, there are still leadership behaviors. Learning how to act with leadership, while not being a formal leader, required a new mindset. Gill argued,

> [W]e don't have managers, we don't have bosses. But we have leadership like some people have more experience or I assume more responsibility.... I'm working in a team where I'm the one with more seniority. So, I'm expected to represent. Or like talk more with the client than the other guys. I may have to protect them from having certain conversations ... because they don't really have the experience. But at the same time, at the same time, they may want to participate. And we're a team and we all have equal voice. So, what is leadership?.... How can I be helpful for my team, how can I be accountable for the client without being bossy? Because it's not about saving, you know, the others.

In traditional organizations it is typically senior leaders who grapple with managing such polarities. Within an SMO, all participants were exposed to these complexities.

Proactive. Participants also reported a change in how they thought about driving change and taking ownership. Rather than waiting for a manager to solve something, they had to do it themselves:

> The first thing you need to understand in self-management is the word “self.” So it's on you. Your career is on you. If you have questions, it's on you. You have to go and seek out. And within this organization, if we do reach out and seek out help, we will get it. But if we don't, then we won't. So it's really about you. Ask, you receive. If you don't ask, you'll get what you didn't ask for. So nothing. (Violet)

For many participants, joining an SMO helped them shift to a proactive rather than a reactive mode:

> [I]t's actually just encouraged a lot of growth in me and being more proactive rather than reactive.... And so, it's really taught me just personally to grow and step up and ask questions and get involved if things aren't making sense, which has worked out really, really well for me on my team.... Like if there's something that needs to be done, you start doing it, you organize around it, you don't wait for someone else to do it, you don't give some idea to your manager? You just do it. (Ron)

Especially after many years in hierarchical systems, this was a significant shift in approach. Since childhood, students are habituated to wait for direction. Now, participants had to learn to take charge of their path themselves. Tim shared,

> A big part of the personal growth was that it's, you are on your own, which is scary, but it's also really free ... all my life, I always had sort of like, the next step, you know. I had school, uni, like bachelor, master, okay, and now suddenly, that I have no direction, you know, now I have to pick it yourself. And it's the same with self-management really, like, no one is telling you this is what you must do. You have your roles, but beyond that, you can do anything ... you decide your own fate. Your fate is in your own hands. And yeah, that's really what you make of it.

For some participants, it wasn't the concept that was hard to internalize, but rather actually learning to make use of their empowerment. This didn't just require a cognitive understanding, but also new habits of mind to actualize them:

> It's not that getting used to it is hard. It's that your mind doesn't think of the possibilities.... I'd be like, "Yeah, I couldn't get the information about this from the internet," or whatever. And he'd be like, "Why don't you just call this person? Just schedule a meeting and just do that." And then, I mean, it was something that my mind didn't really like, click into, because I'd never met this person before, but I knew he was within the organization. So how do you reach out to a random person? Like your mind doesn't come up with the possibility. But then these are things that can be possible within a self-managed organization, but it just takes time for you to adopt that mindset. (Victor)

Collaborative and Open. Working in a self-managing system also pushed participants to relearn how they collaborated with others. For some participants, like Kathy, that began with learning the importance of relational connection:

> I didn't care to like create a relationship with my employees. I didn't really care to like keep my camera on and like tell them about my personal life and stuff like that. But I've realized, with this job, people talk about their personal life so much. They talk with their kids, their dog. Everyone like shows pictures of their dogs and stuff. You know what I mean? It's so much more engaging.

Despite being more boundaried, she began to appreciate that self-managing with peers required a human connection to be successful. The shift in how participants attended to others also led to greater levels of understanding and empathy. Roger shared,

> I think I was able to have more empathy with other people and be better at communicating and connecting with other people. So I learned that I have varied skills. But I just needed to work on it [empathy]. And I feel it is something that I learned, personally.

In addition, it required better communication so that others understood what they needed and where they were coming from. Lowy related, "One of the things I started wanting to work on [was] ways to be vocal about all that [I] wanted or like ... a lot of people can't read your mind." A similar learning was described by Sam:

> You need to self-advocate for yourself and say, "Look, this is what's happening with me. We need to do something to fix it, because this is a pain point in my workflow," or whatever. So yeah, instead of putting your head down and just being you know [accepting], it's not going to get done by somebody else. I'm just going to have to do it ... to self-advocate for what's happening in your week or your life or your day, and how to be humble enough, ask for help.

As participants shifted toward a more collaborative mindset, they also had to learn to become more trusting as well. For participants who had come from traditional environments, this was a gradual process:

> I think I eventually just let go and started to trust the process.... I started worrying less about things. Because I know I'm not alone, right? I'm not the only one that's looking at the goal.... So I started thinking that everything wasn't that terrible. Like, I don't know, I think that probably helped a lot. Right? So it's a lot less stressful. (Lowy)

For participants like Lowy, Sam, and Rob, who had previous managerial experience, learning to trust others and to let go of having to control all the work was a significant transformation:

> So now that I have a lot more trust, in the process of the company, and also in the people that work with me.... I will micromanage a couple of things. Because it's still within me, and I'm still working on it. But I think trust in the environment and on the whole of the workplace became trust in other places. I think that's great, right? I think that's one of the biggest mindset changes. (Lowy)

> “If you want something done right do it yourself.” I mean, that's always been my motto. But that's at the restaurant, I was always the last person there. And if things weren't done at the end of the day, it falls on the manager's shoulders, which was me. So, there was always that and just letting go of that was pretty huge. (Sam)

> I can feel it, viscerally ... because I was the general manager in a “buck stops here” kind of role in the past ... regardless of skill, or fit, or, or anything like that, I was the one that was responsible at the end of the day ... [now] I felt that in my body ... like I'm able to kind of take the back seat not being kind of driving at the front. (Rob)

As noted by Rob, this shift required deep change that was eventually felt on a somatic level. Moving from “driving at the front” to “taking a back seat” required a different body response, one he could feel viscerally once he was able to achieve this change.

This shift also required participants to let go of some deeply held values and beliefs in order to make space for others. Letting go of these competing commitments required reflection and painful sacrifice. Rob evocatively explained:

> [O]ne of the learnings is actually how do you go from this rugged individualist into this more collaborative piece.... I have actually felt ... a call into doing something about it [climate crisis]. That's led me to burn out a couple of times.... Because at one level, it's like this messianic hero. Where would the world be without me seeing the vision? Which is just a disease in a self-managed [organization]. I mean you need the vision, you need the source, but if that person is holding on to it too tightly, you know it doesn't get anything completed. So, I think for me … relaxing into the fact that there’s like a brain trust, like a collective that is now trying to kind of pull this off.

Rob had to recognize how he had stepped into the messianic hero role and choose to let go of it. Doing so also required him to accept that he may not be able to achieve the results he had hoped, with the urgency that he felt was required:

> I've had to realize the earth is burning. So what? How I treat people, and how I involve people, and even sit with them [is what is going to matter more]. Like, I've dealt with my grief about that [the earth burning] and kind of embraced the fact that things are going to change [for the worst], and they are changing and we just have to kind of

> navigate that. So, [now] I could actually play a role of actually inviting people into a space where they can explore some of that, whereas that hasn't been part of my thinking at all.... And really like the deep learning is like to be patient with people's process, I realized I woke up to the fact that I'm not actually very patient.

Moreover, learning to work with others also meant learning to address conflict directly. Violet argued,

> Forget about the process you had [in a traditional organization] if you had an issue with your teammates. Don't go to somebody else if you have an issue or feedback for your teammates. Go to your teammates. Just learn how to deliver those feedbacks because nobody's gonna do it for you, in the end.

This also required learning how to give feedback, which was especially challenging for members like Nick who grew up in more hierarchical cultures. He described,

> [T]hat was a really, like, challenging thing in the beginning.... For the first time, it was very awkward, I can say to be honest, because sharing the feedback. So even it was a positive feedback, it's like sharing it with the complete circle, and the circle commenting on that openly. So that is a new thing, at least for the Indian culture.

Valuing Boundaries. Learning to say no and to establish boundaries was another important pivot for some participants. As was explored earlier, the open nature of SMOs meant that participants were continually confronted by opportunities to get involved in things. To succeed, without overloading themselves, they had to learn boundary setting and to see it as necessary. Jane shared,

> Not just putting all of the needs of the business before myself, but trying to learn that boundary between advocating for myself, and doing what's best for the business. Because I think, potentially, you could really get pulled into one direction or the other.... And I think both of those are bad paths to take in this structure. So, I think in this journey, I have learned the importance of both.

This also required building new habits:

> So the most challenging thing was to, let's say, erase all those bad habits, and start to have good habits in my job. So I think that was a more challenging thing. And I, a couple of months ago, was realizing that I'm not working anymore in those spaces. And I am freer with my time. I do have more control of my time; how do I manage my time? And what can I do? What can I not do? (Roger)

Living in a digital era only compounded the challenge. With work no longer bounded by any specific location, participants had to learn to set boundaries on their personal devices and applications. Sam told,

> I've set boundaries and like, this is what I do when I'm working.... And knowing that it's on ... my personal phone. Even though it's work that you don't have to look at it [at home]. When you go on your phone, you know, like, open up your phone, to go on Instagram, [suddenly] ... you're looking at work, or use your phone to respond to an email or a text. Why do you then follow up and look at work? So, having that, I guess self-control. Turn it off.

Learning Oriented. To succeed in an ambiguous environment, amongst multiple perspectives, participants had to adopt a learning orientation (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). This included not being afraid to fail. Nick, for example, worked to adopt a mindset that encouraged him to push past his comfort zone. He reminded himself that if he succeeded, he would have developed more confidence, and even if he failed, he can always find a workaround.

> So initially, I was bit afraid, like, how can I do that? But those are initial thoughts. Whenever we have any new things, so if it is out of our comfort zone ... our mind says that, “how can we do it” or it doesn't like, allow us to do it very comfortably. But once we do it, then I think doing that only gave me that confidence. And also, it motivates like, from each of the experiences. Like if we are like successfully doing it, then that boosts our confidence and it motivates and inspires us to do more such things. Even if we fail, then we can have some other workarounds for that some of the times.

In addition, participants had to learn to not fear the constructive feedback that sometimes followed failure. This mindset was demonstrated by multiple participants, as illustrated by Violet:

> Confidence means also that if somebody tells you something constructive, you're not going to take it necessarily negatively, or you'll be open to hearing them out. That's what confidence is about. It’s being okay to be told that you're wrong.... It's really like learning to love feedback and want feedback. There's no way you can improve if you don't want feedback.

Moreover, in an SMO, members can receive feedback not only about their work but also how they are relating to others. This feedback can be even more important in an SMO, as it serves to help ensure effective collaboration without managerial oversight:

> The feedback bit is obviously totally different, you know. When you come to this place where it isn't just about managing yourself, it's about managing your impact on other people. And that's really the place where feedback becomes super important. Because you're no longer just responsible for the work that you do, you're responsible to your co-workers, and your co-workers are responsible to you. (Ron)

Learning to embrace this type of feedback required participants to overcome their natural tendency to avoid difficult conversations—something that was difficult to do in practice, even when the value of the feedback was understood. Ron shared,

> There was definitely a learning process there. And I'm still kind of getting there. Like feedback is not easy. And I think that as humans ... we want to avoid those sorts of conflicts so much of the time. And so like, really diving into that is difficult. That's certainly something that I'm still learning, I would say, but something that I believe in and understand the importance of and practice.

Reframing feedback from a difficult conversation to a gift and opportunity helped participants internalize this shift:

> You learn that by practice, and really analyzing and shifting your mindset around feedback. You don't know what you don't know ... the other person on the other end ... They're doing a gift for you to come up to you and say, “Hey, I think you might not know. So here's the information because I care.” They don't say that word for word, obviously. Basically, [if] somebody tells you something, it is because they care.... It's as hard as death for them, as well, to give it. So you really have to take it as a gift. (Violet)

To take feedback as a gift, participants had to also confront their own egos. Once they accepted that their perspective may be limited, they became open to other points of view. As described by Lisa,

> I think it's humbling…. I've had to work with someone in the past couple of months, who's the complete opposite of me. And then we'd have constant feedback sessions, both positive but also constructive feedback. And she would bring different things up that I wasn't aware of, and I'm like, "Whoa," it almost like, takes a stab at my ego.... So I think it's just it's challenging my humility and confidence.

To be able to stay in the discomfort of this experience, Lisa had to recognize that her own perspective, despite her self-awareness, was limited. As Lisa pointed amidst the exchange, “But it's like, oh, they can see my blind spots.” Tim, too, spoke about having to challenge his ego in the context of driving his own learning. This, however, required him to learn how to reach out for help, something that was quite humbling at first.

> That's hard for me. Like, it's this humbling experience. You have to go somewhere with no ego, and be like, hey, can you teach me about this? And you have to do that over, and over, and over again. And every time it hurts a little, you know. You're like, I still don't know anything. I still don’t know anything. I did that for a year.... So, you know, but it's a very humbling experience. And it's hard for me to drop my own ego and just be like, accept that I look stupid right now and just ask this question.

To be able to persistently reach out, Tim had to recognize that his fear that others will look down at him for asking was just an assumption that he could challenge.

> Just accepting that maybe if I ask this question, because I have no background in this and no idea about it, might make me look stupid for the moment. But in reality, you're just seeking knowledge and you know, you're trying to become better. So, it's just in my head. No one really ever thinks that. But yeah, it's a lot about overcoming that [narrative].

To embrace a learning orientation, participants had to also recognize and work through their previous life experience; which impacted how they responded to feedback. Rob explained,

> I think part of my story is that I'm a hidden, and a closeted queer person, for most of my life. And so, hiding and dodging is kind of a way of life. And so, when you work with people, it just doesn't work. And so like, there were definitely some times of feedback, where I had to face the music, and kind of go into these things about my character, my way in the world [that] is frustrating [for others]. And it creates chaos in the system. And so like, what am I going to do at the end of the day about that?

Being able to receive, and understand the impact his behavior was having on others in the organization, helped Rob stay open and begin to move toward change:

> That was a huge moment. So, even just to see the pain that he was having, to give the feedback, helped me let go of some of your own ego. Thinking that you're so perfect or whatever, and [to still] receive the feedback. And at the end of the day, I mean, that's where the glue in the organization was built. And so, feedback was a huge kind of piece.... I remember ... me just kind of being angry and pissed, you know blaming him. Whereas [now], I mean, I know I'm part of that equation.

On an organizational level, beginning with inquiry and a learner's mindset was inherent in many of the decision-making processes participants had to learn. To participate, SMO members had to step beyond the certainty of their own perspective, listen to others, and be OK surfacing tensions they did not have the solutions for. This mirrored some of the individual mindset shifts participants described above, as further elaborated on by Lisa:

> Be prepared to not know the answers. But also know that you're not alone, generative decision-making is all about, finding, being uninformed, and together. So it's like a whole, we're all in this together approach. We want to do this for the greater good, we want to be on the same page.

Being OK with Tension. Another important mindset shift was in how members interpreted ambiguity or conflict. Despite systems and processes designed to resolve them, participants had to face differences in perspectives, unresolved issues, and a lack of direction. While in a traditional organization, things can be escalated up the chain of command for resolution, within SMOs it is left to individuals to propose the path forward. This can take time and is not always successful. Learning to function and be OK amidst these tensions was another mindset shift participants reported. Both Willow and Lisa spoke to being comfortable amidst ambiguity and being OK with things “not being OK” for a time.

On a somatic level, learning to be OK with tension required a significant readjustment, particularly for participants who had experienced negative consequences of tension in the past. Sam shared how his previous work history with difficult managers has led him to continue to carry some of that tension into his new role at the SMO. While he described it as “not a big deal,” the effect clearly still lingered for him and was something he had to learn to manage. As he described, “I still have the anxiety of like, a manager is going to go off.... Letting go of that was big.... I wouldn't say it's even 100% gone.”

Embracing Ownership. Another mindset shift noted by participants was from employee to owner. While not all SMO participants are legal owners (which raised tensions for Jane as noted in the challenges section), they all encouraged an ownership culture and mindset.

> It's just changing the words, but also yeah, the mentality of like, "Yeah, I have no boss. I'm the CEO of my role" ... our whole company preaches on freedom and responsibility and so act on it and understand what it means to have freedom and understand what it means to have the responsibility [for the company as a whole). (Lisa)

In addition to motivating more proactive behavior, an ownership mindset also changed how participants saw themselves within the organization. It eliminated the traditional employee/ supervisor divide that many had been accustomed to. Now they, too, felt the responsibility of ownership:

> In a lot of organizations, I think it's easy to assume a confrontational or adversarial relationship between oneself and one's managers, or the owners of the company. Along a lot of different lines, including, you know, power and compensation or like those sorts of things. But in this company, you kind of have to unlearn that a little bit. (Ron)

Moreover, embracing an ownership mindset also meant having to give up on the ability to just coast along. Ron further described,

> And honestly, it [an adversarial relationship] makes things easier in some workplaces, right ... there are like lots of people who just really super mailed it in [took it easy].... I wasn't angry at those people ... like, well, maybe he's paying you like $7 an hour like heck, like who cares.... And like the management and the workers are all on the same page in a way ... there can be simplicity there.

Being able to honestly name both the pros and cons of self-management helped Ron feel like he was making a real choice. This choice then enabled him to fully embrace the ownership and the responsibility that came along with it. As he shared, “I also really do believe that it is a question of losses and gains ... it's not perfect, and it's not always amazing, but it seems to me the best of the options that we have right now.”

Lastly, for participants from a more hierarchical culture, embracing an ownership mindset meant leaning into the idea that all members of the SMO are equal peers. This was a radical shift and one that some still struggled with at times. Victor shared:

> I'm from India. So, I come from a very traditionally hierarchical world.... So, I think it still carries over.... I'm not as good at communicating my thoughts if they are negative with older gentlemen and older ladies, because I feel that I will offend them. You know, and it's a bit hard because if you're working in a team, then transparency and communication is the name of the game, because the team needs to move forward. Right?

Finding #4

Transitioning into self-management is a nonlinear process that unfolded over time. For many participants it began years before they joined an SMO and continued even after their formal onboarding period was completed.

As described, participants reported having to do two different kinds of learning as they onboarded into an SMO. The first was single-loop, instrumental, learning focused on understanding self-management processes and learning specific needed skills. The second was double-loop learning, focused on changing the assumptions and mindsets that were standing in the way of them fully leaning into self-management. Both kinds of learning were critical enablers of full participation. The single-loop learning gave the participants an understanding of the processes and specific skills they would need, while the double-loop learning enabled the mindset shifts that were required for the participants to make use of these processes.

However, these mindset shifts described in the previous section were not singular events, moments of sudden epiphany, or breakthrough. Rather, for most of the participants, they were part of a process that emerged over time—a learning journey that had many twists and turns along the way. While the single-loop learning was fairly linear and accelerated through formal training and onboarding, the double-loop learning emerged in a non-linear manner. Moreover, many participants experienced a shift in one area while they still struggled somewhere else. Thus, the transition into self-management experienced by participants was a gradual process, which often began years before they joined the SMO and continued after their formal onboarding process was completed.

Gradual

The gradual nature of her shift was voiced by Jane as she detailed her process of gaining confidence and learning to speak up for her needs "For me it was relatively gradual. Yeah. No, I can't pinpoint one moment in my head [when it all shifted]." This sentiment was echoed by Gill, who described the process of understanding self-management as one that "took time." This same idea was illustrated by Roger, who shared that while he had been working in the SMO for almost two years, it was only recently that he had the realization that he was allowing his old habits and mindset to push him into taking on too many projects and overwork: "I was realizing that I'm not working anymore in those spaces.... I do have more control over my time."

Even Victor, who uniquely talked about his experience as a singular shift, still described several twists and turns, as he tried to internalize and operationalize it—something that, perhaps, he didn't even fully recognize as our interview unfolded—as illustrated in these excerpts below. At first, Victor described stepping into self-management as "one switch":

> I like taking ownership and taking accountability. So, for me to start doing things in a self-managed way was just one switch. It didn't take too much, per se. Once you start realizing that, yeah, you can really start pushing yourself here. And then and then you just do. For me, that's how it was.

However, elsewhere, he expanded his narrative to include more of his challenges. "I wouldn't say it was easy. I think it took me at least three months [to get the hang of self-management and how the processes work]." Lastly, when he shared about his experience giving feedback, he shared that he still struggled to view himself as a full peer with older members: "For me that is still super hard. I am not good at giving feedback to older people ... there’s still that stigma in my mind [from his Indian cultural background]. That is pretty hard.”

Despite a broad range of tenure, many of the other participants also named areas in which they are still struggling to actualize some of the shifts they described:

> I’ve got issues with power. And so, I [still] come with those issues as I try to navigate that [balance between autonomy and collaboration]. (Rob)
>
> I would say I am gaining confidence ... but have I done one [inkling post] yet? Nope, not yet? (Violet)
>
> And I am still kind of getting there, like feedback is not easy. (Ron)
>
> I’m still working on it [trust and letting go of micromanagement habits].... I think that's one of the biggest mindset changes too. (Lowy)
>
> I’m not 100%. It’s been a learning curve. I'm [still] not 100% certain how to manage my time. (Sam)

While they had made significant strides and had meaningful mindset shifts, there were still many elements that were in progress. Furthermore, even when they had the insight to understand the cause of some of their challenges, it was still difficult to break the old patterns of behavior. Lisa attributed her challenges with overwork in part to feeling pressure to be “pleasing my coworkers” and recognized “I think that's something I need to work on.” Cory, too, experienced a gradual process, but did identify a tipping point along the way. As described earlier, he struggled with some of the mechanics of self-management and felt that the lack of foundational training exacerbated his challenges. It was when he finally had clarity on the processes and principles that it really come together for him:

Nonlinear

A successful adoption of a mindset in one area did not always translate elsewhere. While he embraced many aspects of self-management, Tim felt he still struggled with a lack of direction and mentorship—the responsibility for which he placed on his own shoulders:

> I am lacking mentorship in a way, which is also my own fault, because according to the process, I should just get a sparring partner, which I haven't done.... If you don't do it yourself, no one will do it for you.

In addition, many participants were able to shift one mindset while still struggling in another. Nick felt like "I don't have those concerns [anymore]" when it came to asking for permission or approval. However, as he described dealing with overwork and having to juggle multiple roles, Nick shared that he was "still struggling."

Moreover, as their experience with self-management unfolded, new challenges often emerged. This was Gill's experience. As he stepped up to lead a working team, he began having to grapple with the nature of a leadership role within a self-management context—something he was still processing at the time of the interview, "for the last few months." Participants also recognized that beyond their immediate needs, there were still many more self-management principles and practices to internalize. Rob shared, "I feel like a baby still."

Still Being Integrated

Even after they had cognitive realizations, participants still expressed ways in which these shifts had not fully integrated into their psyches and bodies. Lisa described feeling "still a little weird," as she recounted her challenges proposing her vacation time. Kathy, too, used the word "weird" to describe how she felt as she caught herself using positional language to describe her team's leader. "It's weird right? It takes a little bit of getting used to for sure."

Moreover, even after they had significant mindset shifts, participants still had to contend with the somatic imprint of their time in hierarchical organizations. This was especially true for Sam, who described some of these lingering effects. After working in hierarchical organizations for over 20 years, he spoke of "the voice in the back of my head," which was not "even 100% gone." Rob, too, spoke about the narrative he still carried with him from his previous experience. As he entered feedback conversations, he realized that he was still carrying a fear of rejection from his past. He explained that it was "from my story, like, [I'm] always afraid that I'm going to be rejected."

Seeded in Previous Experiences

While the demands of self-management catalyzed the mindset shifts that have been described, for many participants they were rooted in earlier life experiences. It was these experiences that prepared the ground for the double-loop learning that was required later. Therefore, many participants' learning journeys stretched back prior to joining the SMO and were still unfolding at the time of the interview:

> I think 60% of it is from my life journey coming into it and like the learning that I wanted to do for myself. Finding this organization was just a nice surprise.... When I learned about it, I was like it's not a joke? I thought it was a scam. Looks to be too fun to be true. Yeah, after that, coming into it really just reinforced some of the learning that I had started and helped expand it. (Violet)

For some, these prior experiences included personal growth and development:

> One of the things that made me quit my other job was I finally got into therapy and started working out stuff. And one of the things I started wanting to work out ways to be vocal about what you want all the want, or like, a lot of people can't read your mind. (Lowy)
>
> I'm 26 now; when I was around 22, I sort of had a realization that I wasn't doing enough in the sense that I was sort of wasting my potential.... And when I started my master's degree, I'm like, I'm going to give this my best. I'm going to take accountability. I've also read a lot of books on this topic of productivity and stuff. And internalizing ... that there are things that are out of my control. But in the things that I do, taking responsibility for them and taking accountability for them is the less complicated path forward. (Victor)
>
> I was looking for something. And I couldn't find it in other enterprises.... I was working like on my character, so to say. [Even before the SMO]. Like, I don't want to be bossy, I don't want to be too shy, I don't want a lot of things in my personality. But sometimes, you know, the environment, it doesn't work with a version of yourself you want to build. (Gill)

For others, it was an external challenge that pushed them to begin challenging their mindsets. Sam had his previous work experience, as well as having to advocate for his son with learning disabilities. For Violet, it was having to work in a call center despite having English as a second language:

> Being a second-language English speaker made me like have a few uncomfortable situations all the time, basically ... my first language is French. So English was my second language, and opening my mouth, I had to learn how to be confident with the uncomfortable and just do it anyway. Be comfortable with being awkward.

Tim attributed some of his learning around collaboration and facilitation to his childhood. The third of three brothers, he was often “the mediator,” which taught him “how to put someone against someone. I like, try to make them come together in agreement.”

For Willow, it was her experience as a freelance consultant that helped her learn to be proactive and not reach out to others when problem solving, as well as some training she did earlier in her career. These helped her learn to “not be scared to ask for help, or more to ask for what I need,” despite not being “like that at all when I was younger.”

In addition, some participants described how their previous interests pushed them toward self-management and motivated their learning journey along the way. For Roger, his previous studies in communication inspired his search for a job at an SMO, while also motivating him to want to continue to deepen his collaborative skillset and mindset. Ron attributed some of his comfort with ambiguity to his early interest in the subject and study of Kafka:

> I was really big into the works of Franz Kafka, who's a famously ambiguous, nonsense, sort of writer. And so, I've always, you know, from a young age enjoyed ambiguity, because the problem to solve you know, like, especially questions that don't have right answers, that become a question of strategy are really interesting to me.

For Rob, it was his philosophy of human potential and belief in individuality that made self-management so resonant:

> When I was introduced to the concept, it almost was like the thing I've been working for, or like it's the framework that I've been working for my entire life, just didn't have a name for it. And so, when I saw it, like I leapt at it ... everything about it resonated with how I see the world, how I approach the world. You know, seeing people as unique souls

> that have so much to contribute, but so often our structures limit that. So yeah, I was very excited to kind of jump in.

As illustrated by these experiences, participants' transition into self-management was a gradual process. For some participants, the roots of this transformation began years before they joined an SMO. Moreover, their double-loop learning continued to unfold in a nonlinear way past any official “sponsorship” or “onboarding” period. The gradual nature of new members' learning was also reinforced by the focus group participants. They spoke about the need for multiple experiences with self-management practices and many emotional realizations before actual transformation could take place.

Finding #5

Formal training supported instrumental learning, while mindset shifts were more supported by informal learning.

As described previously, there were several things that participants reported as supportive to their single-loop, instrumental, learning. These included formal training, self-management resources such as manuals and wikis, books and videos, as well as a specific onboarding period.

However, most what participants described as supportive to their onboarding was informal learning. This was especially true of what was reported as supportive to the double-loop learning. While formal training was found to be helpful, it did not suffice. Despite understanding specific self-management practices and processes, participants still had to overcome internal limitations before being able to utilize them.

For many participants, the key mindset shifts that were required included self-authorizing, finding confidence, understanding themselves, both/and thinking, shifting to a proactive mindset, becoming collaborative and open, valuing boundaries, adopting a learning orientation, being OK with tension, and embracing ownership. While each of these was an internal shift, there were things that participants reported were supportive to them as they went through this learning journey. These included mentorship and coaching, team discussion, learning through experience, and modeling. Each of these will be further discussed below.

Mentorship and Coaching

Having someone available to answer questions and help guide their self-management journey proved invaluable to many participants. These mentors came from a range of different roles. Some participants were paired with a mentor as part of their official onboarding process, while others received mentorship from the team leader, circle link, or even a member of the team:

> There's always a list of people that you can always reach out to whenever it comes to whatever “Teal”-related thing that you're doing.... So I guess they see their own responsibility of being a mentor. Even if you're not asking them, they play that role really well. (Kathy)
>
> I do have a mentor. She is a recruitment manager. But she doesn't have power over us but I still look at her as someone who can mentor me and look into it and so she has been here for over six years. And so I've looked to her for any coaching and advice. (Lisa)
>
> I had to choose my mentors. She was part of my team.... But I have more seniority than her ... [but] she was very involved in the culture from day one. And I was coming from different kinds of companies. So, I choose her ... that … isn't really common. But I felt that she was one. (Gill)
>
> The check-ins that we would have with our lead link ... say those check-ins are really helpful. (Jane)
>
> We have a role called sparring partners, where we choose a mentor, whom we can talk with and also discuss the individual development plan.... So, that person is like a mentor to us, whom we can discuss all those things, like, even if it is a bit informal. (Nick)

These mentors also supported participants in different ways. One way was through answering specific questions. Another was through reflective dialogue. This helped participants make sense of their options and choices and then decide where they wanted to adjust:

> [T]hose check-ins are really helpful. Because it's like in those moments that you kind of throw out what's working well, what's not working well, what you'd like to do, what roles are not a good fit, and you think could be a good fit for someone else, or to move into a different area.... I feel like you can kind of get into a silo and having someone affirm you and your decisions and what you're thinking and the work you've been doing definitely helped me in particular. (Jane)
>
> You always have that space to call her and be like, “Hey, this is not going right. I want to move into this.” (Kathy)
>
> I went back to him and I was like, hey, this situation came up, how should we go about it? And then he'd go through the process with me. (Sam)
>
> My mentor, she was amazing. So, she helped me a lot trying to understand the issue from different angles. So, we could explore the situation and try to focus on something that we can do. [It] is not just about talking, but then you know, focus on something that we can do today, tomorrow or whenever, maybe it's a meeting, maybe it's an experiment, maybe it's feedback that I should give to someone I don't know. (Gill)

A third way was to hold space for participants. This open-ended time helped participants have a safe space to sense-make through situations, explore their own experience, or brainstorm possibilities. As told by Cory and Lowy,

> We discuss everything actually. So, we don't have a fixed agenda or anything. It's just what comes to our mind. What's top of our mind right now? What issues do we have? What are we struggling with ... curious questions that made me speak and in a way that it was okay, to be what can you call it, insecure and what to do. And so, that was actually some kind of relief that we could have this one-on-one conversation discussing anything and there was no wrong questions or answers and so on. (Cory)
>
> I think one great thing that happened with this guy was every time I was having one of these inner doubts ... I will go to him ... knowing that there's a relationship of trust ... he wouldn't go and snitch on me, either on the rest of the company or whatever.... So yes, it's a sense of safety and safe space ... to be able to ask all the questions that I have. (Lowy)

A fourth way was through teaching self-management content. Kathy experienced this in a more informal way, while for Violet there was more of a set process:

> I think that helped me a lot because that was just strictly about learning “Teal” and self-management.... It was like an hour long where like you just get to like talk. It's not work-related. It's just about “Teal” and things that you'd want to understand. It's basically an “Oprah” conversation and they just literally teach you about “Teal.” It doesn't even

> feel like it's like a lecture or something. It just feels like conversation, which is great. (Kathy)

> So we would go through the entire operating system together.... And then you check them off as you go through it ... she would check in with me saying, “Do you have a question about that or I notice you haven't done that one yet. Let's review it together.” And really coach through all of the process and the practice. (Violet)

A fifth way was helping participants make sense of their own personality type, strengths, and weaknesses. Ron found the recommendation to explore his Enneagram type helpful as well as the opportunity to have a coaching session with another team member about it:

> I had a coaching session with one of the senior members on our team. And his Enneagram was kind of opposite of mine. And so, we had a very deep and interesting and kind of pivotal conversation, a lot of ways for me to discover, what are those things that I missing that other people seem to have that that comes very, very easily to them? And what do I have that that other people don't? And so that was an informal structure,

A sixth way was helping participants chart their next steps and career path forward. As shared by several participants, due to the lack of an explicit career path within an SMO, brainstorming opportunities and possible next steps with another was really useful.

Learning through Experience

The opportunity to try new things, sometimes fail, and then try to adapt played a significant role in the learning process that participants reported. In Nick’s experience, this was even more valuable than the coaching, as it enabled him to internalize what he had been taught:

> [L]ike the time is the only thing and trying it out. So, these two things are very important. Like rather than coaching. So coaching is also important, like in the initial phase, where there can be some theoretical material that can be shared, or, like if there is any help or seminars given like, where we have a trainer training, some of the things, but the actual things that we learn is through time, and by trying it out ourselves.

In Kathy's experience, the coaching she received enabled her to redirect her actions as a situation unfolded:

> So I actually ended up messaging my team lead about it, but the first thing she just told me was to put it in the in the group chat, like our whole team's chat and ask everybody. It's not just about asking her because she's not of the authority. So I thought

> that was really nice that like she didn't tell me "yes or no." She was just like "get everyone's opinion and see if everyone's okay with it because we're a team" like.

Lisa also spoke about the importance of learning through experience and shared that it was only when she went through having to make a proposal and go through the process that it really came together for her. This is in part because of the gap between the cognitive understanding of how the process works and the full felt experience of that process and the emotions and subconscious responses it evoked:

> You don't know until you go through it yourself. So I think the biggest thing is to just do it, put your hand up for it. Because yeah. We know the seven steps. But until you're at it, it's like, "Whoa, you're involved."

As Lisa said, you may "know" the "steps," but being "involved" is a different experience. This sentiment was echoed by other members as well:

> I'm a proponent of like putting myself into the fire. It is what teaches me stuff. And you learn things by doing. (Victor)
>
> Yeah, it was kind of learn the hard way. Certain aspects, or you learn from your mistakes.... I was just going to say, I've learned from my mistakes a couple times in this role. And just even just small little errors, but you can see how they accumulate or how they affect something further down the line. (Sam)
>
> I guess, practicing and helping others with self-management is really the point at which it really clicked. (Ron)
>
> For me, it was about like learning in work more than anything or concept as well. (Violet)

Positive experiences helped reinforce members' learnings. Nick said, "Once I like successfully contacted and got what I wanted, then that boosted my confidence even more." Furthermore, having others affirm their ability to self-manage during the day-to-day course of their work also helped solidify the shift. Victor shared,

> Every time that I wanted to do something ... I was directly going with that person and asking that person, "Hey, I would love to share some of my knowledge with the rest of the team. And am I able to do it?" And that person was like, "Yeah, of course, you don't need to ask me, you, you can do it."

While not the same as an actual experience, even a simulation helped bridge the gap between theory and practice. Lisa detailed a feedback exercise they did in breakout sessions as part of her formal training and spoke to how valuable it was.

Group Discussions

Having an opportunity to dialogue with other members of their team was identified as one of the most supportive elements in participants' perception of their experience. Kathy described,

> I love that it was always that teamwork and like working as a team and everything going through your team and getting approval from them and there's like that mentors and advisors process and stuff has made it so much easier where you're not feeling like you're all by yourself trying to figure this whole thing out. So that was really helpful.

Sam echoed Kathy's remarks about the value of the team support and dialogue despite the focus on individuality in self-management:

> Honestly, I think the most supportive thing has been just the weekly team meetings, and the team gatherings. Just because even though it's a self-managed system, we're also working together. So, it's just nice to have that connectedness. (Sam)

The value of the team's support was a strong theme throughout many of the interviews. Victor, Cory, Lisa, and Violet all spoke specifically to the value of this team level support. Lowy also pointed out that the diversity of viewpoints on his team helped him get clearer about what it was that he wanted to do himself:

> Diversity in I don't know environments, diversity, or ways of thinking about how this person interacts with not only their teams but also their team members and everything in between. I think it helped me a lot to realize what I wanted for myself.

Roger, too, spoke about the value that a diversity of viewpoints and experience on his team afforded him, as well as the learning he had observing others. Moreover, as pointed out by Nick, there was emotional support in being able to share questions and challenges with the team, in addition to any specific solutions that are produced.

In addition to their working teams, some also participated in a learning group. This was a cohort of new members within the SMO intentionally brought together on a cadence to further their self-management practice. Cross-functional leadership team meetings were also utilized to brainstorm ideas and explore possibilities within a self-managing context, as well as discussions with family members and friends. Roger shared about the way "suddenly these ideas come in" when he discussed things with his wife and others.

Moreover, many participants spoke to the impact of their regular feedback practice within their teams and how it helped drive their own learning. Lisa explained,

> It was really through that feedback practice, when people are just giving each other feedback, whether it's positive or constructive, we're encouraged to just hop on a phone call, do a quick meeting, or let people know how they've impacted you. And how that's impacted yourself, themselves, or the business, either way, keep giving feedback, because the biggest way to grow is through feedback, because you won't know what to work on unless you get feedback.

While most participants spoke about their experiences discussing things with their teams in isolation, Gill linked those discussions with the formal learning he was also engaging in:

> I also may watch videos, have some readings, from time to time, I enjoy books, we share books, from time to time. Trying to talk with people that has experience in things that I don't have experience, that is the *main [emphasis added]* resource, I will say.... Yeah, [the dialogue] that's the main thing, I would say. But then you have to formalize because you may speak about a few concepts. But then you have to read the book, or try to formalize what you spoke, things like that.

This reinforces the point that all the different forms of learning participants engaged in compounded and reinforced each other. While for the purposes of illustration they have been listed separately, they were woven together in the participant experience.

Reflection

While much of the learning participants reported took place with others, some did also mention the value of individual study and reflection. This enabled them to reflect on their experience and to internalize some of the mindset shifts they were experiencing:

> I was deeply meditating about it. If I was doing things properly or if I'm doing things, not in the best possible way. And what I was able to improve, so I was always asking myself, "Am I doing things correctly or what can I do to improve it?" It was somehow a way of allowing me to think beyond my thinking. And I think it's a little bit of a thrill, this quote, and a lot of people say, you need to think outside the box. And actually, that happened. And I believe that by asking myself a lot of things I was able to understand it. (Roger)

Willow also mentioned meditation and how she utilized her journaling practice for a similar kind of reflection, which helped her think through challenging situations.

Modeling

Seeing how others, especially high status members of the SMO, practiced self-management was another significant thing participants found to be supportive. Kathy said,

> My team lead, because she is such an open and like outgoing person, like I kind of realized the kind of personality that she attracted and like who she talked to a lot more, too.... So that made me feel like the way I can get closer to her and like have a great relationship with her. It was by doing the same thing.

Rob, too, spoke about the powerful impact of modeling, especially in seeing how the self-management practices could be applied:

> We've really relied on Don ... there's a ton of great resources out there but to have someone actually use some of those tools, like retrospectives with GDMs differently there's been a pretty steep learning curve. But then being part of those and watching them generate just beautiful information and shared information, without the egos and the, the typical power broking that I've seen in most kinds of team meetings. So, that was a huge one.

In addition to how they utilized specific particles, Willow spoke to the impact of the general humility the more experienced members of her SMO displayed:

> I'm really impressed by how they're just humble in that way. So, that's surprising, because they would think that that's something the ego or their ego would feel as a loss [since they don’t have positional power]. But yeah, that's the case here.

The impact of these more senior members choosing to show up differently also impacted Sam, who shared that when he is triggered, or experiencing anxiety from some of his previous history, his lead links humor and gentle reminders, were very supportive. On the other hand, modeling also increased the pressure some participants placed on themselves and in that way made participation in self-management seem more difficult, as was illustrated by Kathy's remarks about her anxiety:

> [O]nly because I see so many people who have been in the company for so long do it so well … and it feels like I need a little bit more experience for me to start…. I do feel a little bit of anxiety towards it though.

Summary of Findings

My research on the unique experience of onboarding into a self-managing organization (SMO) produced five main findings.

The first key finding was that *onboarding processes experienced by participants varied widely, ranging from limited to well-structured and comprehensive*. Three factors that shaped the onboarding experience were identified: (a) a phased approach to members, (b) formal self-management training and curriculum, and (c) dedicated onboarding roles.

The second key finding was that *all participants faced significant challenges when it came to engaging in self-management.* These were then further differentiated to personal and organizational challenges. Personal challenges reported by participants included: (a) having to shoulder the weight of the responsibility, (b) facing fear of judgments and unacceptance by the collective, (c) overcoming informal hierarchy, (d) finding confidence in themselves and their value, (e) navigating a lack of guidance, (f) managing overwork, (g) dealing with cognitive overwhelm, and (h) struggles with prioritization. Organizational challenges with self-management that were experienced were: (a) increased ambiguity, (b) lack of accountability and feedback, (c) organizational incoherence, and (d) self-management decisioning being too slow.

The third key finding was *that all participants reported having to learn to shift their mindset in order to successfully participate within an SMO*. Common mindset shifts that were reported included (a) self-authorizing, (b) finding confidence, (c) changed sense of self,

(d) Both/And thinking, (e) becoming proactive, (f) collaborative and open, (g) valuing boundaries, (h) adopting a learning orientation, (i) being OK with tension, and (j) embracing ownership.

The fourth key finding was that *transitioning into self-management is a nonlinear process that unfolded over time. For many participants it began years before they joined an SMO and continued after their formal onboarding period was completed*. Several salient characteristics of this process were identified. The first was that it was gradual. The second was that it was nonlinear. The third was that it was often still being integrated, while the fourth was that it was often seeded in previous experience.

The fifth and final key finding was that *while formal training and onboarding supported participants' instrumental learning, double-loop learning was more supported by informal means*." Among the most significant components of participants' informal learning were: (a) mentorship and coaching, (b) learning through experience, (c) group discussions, (d) reflection, and (e) modeling.

These findings support many of the themes explored in the literature review, particularly around some of the challenges of self-management and the transformative learning needed to overcome them. In the next chapter, they will be analyzed and discussed in greater detail.

Chapter 5: Analysis

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to study the learning required to onboard into a self-managed organization (SMO). It was anticipated that a deeper understanding of this learning will be beneficial to SMOs as they seek to recruit, onboard, and support new members. In addition, it would provide prospective members with a clear view of what they may face, enabling them to better self-select and prepare if they chose to apply.

To explore this topic, a qualitative study was conducted, and four research questions were explored:

RQ1: How did participants experience their onboarding?

RQ2: What unique challenges were present onboarding into self-management, and where within the organization did those challenges reside?

RQ3: What kind of learning was needed to help new members meet these onboarding challenges?

RQ4: What was supportive to new members learning as they onboarded?

At the core of these questions was an inquiry into the unique experience of self-management. Why, despite its emancipatory promise do people still seem to struggle? Does its revolutionary structure truly empower its members? What role do individual learning and development play in revolutionary organization design?

To begin to answer these questions, 15 in-depth interviews with members from a range of SMOs were conducted. The data were then coded, analyzed, and grouped into key findings. In addition, a review of publicly available organizational documents and a focus group were used to triangulate the findings.

As presented in Chapter 4, the five key findings were:

KF1: Formal learning enabled a quick grounding in the basic mechanisms of self-management.

KF2: All participants faced challenges applying the principles and practices of self-management in practice.

KF3: All participants had to learn to shift their mindsets in order to successfully participate in self-management.

KF4: Transitioning into self-management was a nonlinear process that unfolded over time. For many participants it began years before they joined an SMO and continued even after their formal onboarding period was completed.

KF5: Formal training supported instrumental learning, while mindset shifts were more supported by informal learning.

These findings mostly answered the four research questions above. Overall, participants had a range of onboarding support from chaotic to well-structured. However, regardless of the support provided by the formal onboarding process, all participants still struggled to adjust to self-management. While they appreciated the freedom and empowerment self-management offered, many had to wrestle with the added responsibility it demanded of them. This was especially true with regard to proposing, decision-making, and other activities that required them to exercise power, or step back from it. Moreover, participants also faced organizational challenges with self-management that impacted their ability to be successful—particularly with the organizational incoherence many experienced.

To manage all these challenges, new members had to engage in both single- and double-loop learning. The single-loop learning was focused on understanding the mechanisms of self-management, while the double-loop learning was required to enable the mindset shifting needed to successfully make use of those mechanisms. While formal learning and onboarding processes helped support single-loop learning, double-loop learning was more supported by informal means. The depth and availability of this support among participants varied greatly, and most were still integrating aspects of their learning at the time of the interview.

This chapter will analyze and interpret these findings for greater insight and understanding. While the previous chapter sought to parse apart the data, the purpose of this chapter is to synthesize it into a holistic picture (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). As a secondary level of analysis (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008), relevant literature will be referenced and discussed.

To provide a structure for this synthesis, the four research questions listed above were consolidated into two primary themes. The first theme pertains to the experience of onboarding into an SMO and the unique challenges it raises. The second theme relates to the learning required to overcome those challenges and the methods that supported it.

Analysis

Theme 1: Onboarding into an SMO and the Unique Challenges It Raised

The Experience of Onboarding

Onboarding into an SMO is a unique experience. An entirely new approach to work needs to be understood and internalized in addition to learning the particulars of a specific role. While entry into any organization requires socialization, joining an SMO is akin to traveling to a foreign country. An entirely different set of principles, process, and thermology had to be learned and new behaviors developed.

Several of the key findings (KF) described in Chapter 4 had direct bearing on how participants experienced this socialization process. KF1 illustrated how the formal learning participants experienced ranged from very limited to significant. This contributed to the differences in the participants' overall experience with onboarding, with Tim feeling like it was the Wild West, while Kathy seemed fairly satisfied.

As described in Chapter 2, self-efficacy and a knowledge of organizational culture were both identified as key levers for successful onboarding (Bauer, 2010). For Tim, and other participants who experienced a very unstructured process, the lack of these foundational elements made the entire socialization more challenging. They struggled to understand how the processes they were using worked and which procedure to follow. Considering how different many of the SMOs' processes and terminology are, it is likely even more important to strengthen those basic elements within the onboarding process.

However, it would be a mistake to assume that those participants who learned the processes and terminology early had a smooth transition into self-management. One of the most important distinctions that emerged in the research was between understanding the mechanisms and processes of self-management and full participation. As captured in KF2, even for those who were satisfied with their onboarding process, there were significant personal and organizational challenges that were triggered by this way of working. These challenges impeded new members' ability to fully exercise self-management, even when they knew the steps required.

Moreover, as explored in KF4, the transition into self-management was a nonlinear process. The time it took until members felt comfortable with self-management extended far beyond their formal onboarding period. While the onboarding literature suggests this is true for many organizations (Bauer et al., 2007), within SMOs the additional lift of needing to adapt to self-management may draw the onboarding period out even further. Especially for SMOs that have a phased membership model, this is an important finding. A phased membership model allowed for additional learning within the first few months, but may also imply false readiness once members "graduate." Moreover, onboarding can be mistakenly associated with training and induction, rather than the longer process of socialization. This may be why, when asked about their onboarding experience, many participants spoke only to their formal onboarding processes, and not some of the mindset shifts and socialization that were also necessary. Yet, self-management is a critical component of membership in an SMO, and until these mindset shifts were achieved, members were not "prepared for their jobs" (Bauer, 2010).

Overall, the holistic impression formed by the findings was that the onboarding period was one of paradox and complexity. Participants felt both more freedom and more stress. They felt more supported by the collective, as well as the additional stress and pressure that resulted from shared governance. They appreciated the range of opportunity and struggled defining boundaries and priorities. The nuances of this experience resisted simplistic definitions, and it encompassed many states. Participants were energized, drained, engrossed, overwhelmed, and at times transformed—sometimes in parallel and in non-linear ways. This contrasts with the view of Haslett (2019), who reported a "dichotomous relationship from having greater responsibility," with some experiencing more ownership, while others felt more stress (see Chapter 2). This research, however, suggests that both were true—often happening in parallel. This aligned with Ryhänen (2020), who found that while "freedom is empowering, it simultaneously creates cognitive strain" (p.76), and Nissi (2021), who found that members felt the decision-making processes within an SMO to be mainly positive, but also "straining" (p. 80).

Unique Challenges Raised

KF2 found that "all participants faced significant challenges" as part of their socialization process. As explored in Chapter 4, these challenges included both personal and organizational obstacles that were triggered by their experience with self-management. However, to understand which of these challenges were truly unique, a deeper analysis is needed. Many new hires experience personal challenges, such as "overwork" or the "fear of judgment," that were listed in Chapter 4. What made these challenges unique to self-management was not their expression, but their cause. While similar feelings may be felt in other organizations, the reasons for those feelings are often different. In addition, the range of members impacted by them is also more limited. The greater freedom SMOs offer their members also meant that all their members had to struggle with challenges that in traditional organizations were reserved for a select few. The specific aspects of each challenge that I suspect are unique to self-management are illustrated in additional detail in Table 5.1. While these challenges may be present for some in traditional organizations, within SMOs they are inescapable. A similar pattern emerged in the analysis of the organizational challenges participants experienced identified in Chapter 4. Here too, while these challenges are not unique to SMOs, they are likely magnified by self-management, as listed in Table 5.2.

Table 5.1

Aspects of Personal Onboarding Challenges Unique to Self-management

Challenge	Unique to Self-management
Shouldering the weight of the responsibility	No manager shielding you. All feel the pressure. No role without some responsibility for the entire org.
Facing fear of judgment and unacceptance by the collective	The importance of the group is amplified. The opinion of the group toward the new person matters even more than in traditional organizations where it is the responsibility of the boss to deal with new employees. Greater levels of transparency can lead to more vulnerability for those sharing.
Navigating informal hierarchy	Absence of formal hierarchy can exacerbate the presence and impact of informal hierarchy. Discrepancy between espoused equality and lived experience can be jarring.
Finding confidence in themselves and their value	Active participation and proposal making is a core requirement of membership. Even individual contributors must participate in governance.
Finding path forward without guidance	No leaders charged with the development of their direct reports. Responsibility for pulling support and guidance lies solely on individual members.
Overwork	The convergence of peer responsibility, fluid roles, ownership rhetoric, and often deep ideological commitment leads to amplified pressure. Discrepancies between levels of authority (high) and compensation (standard).
Cognitive overwhelm	The need to learn self-management, a new way of working with its own methodology and terminology, in addition the particulars of any role.
Prioritization	The breath of possibilities available and the lack of any managerial guidance.

Table 5.2

Aspects of Organizational Onboarding Challenges Unique to Self-management

Challenge	Unique to self-management
Ambiguity	Intentional role fluidity, shared organizational responsibility
Lack of Accountability & Feedback	Lack of individual managerial responsibility. The responsibility is rather on the collective, which can lead to it not being taken up, or to being intensified.
Organizational Incoherence	Exacerbated by a lack of formal leadership. Focus on teams often leads to a lack broader coherence
Slow Decisioning	A commitment to collective governance and decisioning processes

Furthermore, all organizations must maintain the balance between diversion and conversion (Dooley & Van de Ven, 2016). Too much convergence stifles innovation and creativity, while too much divergence can lead to incoherence. By radically empowering individuals, SMO may be upsetting this balance. This would suggest that SMOs may therefore require even stronger teaming practices to come back into alignment. The fact that many of the participants struggled with organizational ambiguity, accountability, coherence, and decisioning suggests that this was not yet achieved. This parallels Olsson and Bosch (2018), who found that empowered teams often struggle with broader strategic questions, and Bernstein et al.'s (2016) contention that SMOs can struggle with strategy.

Impact of Demographics. Another important question that was explored was the difference between participants. Although the sample size of 15 participants was too small for meaningful statistical analysis, some interesting patterns did emerge. First, despite the wide range of different industries, geographies, and cultures represented within this sample, participants' experiences were surprisingly similar. When analyzing both the specific challenges as well as the mindset shifts, there were no significant outliers between the cohorts. This suggests that there is a shared phenomenon of “onboarding into self-management” that transcends organizational contexts.

However, of the seven demographic variables, there were some that seemed to show an outsized impact, as listed in Table 5.3 below. For example, 77.8% of the participants ages 25-34 struggled with confidence and lack of guidance. This may suggest that those with more life experience struggle a bit less with those challenges. This is reinforced by the fact that 83.3% of those participants with less than 3 years' experience in organizations struggled with these same challenges. This seems to indicate that previous organizational experience can help buttress members' confidence and lack of guidance and that less experienced participants had a harder time.

Yet, a deeper examination of the data reveals that while only 33.3% of participants with 6-10 years of experience struggled with confidence and guidance, 66.7% of participants with 11-15 years of experience struggled with those two challenges. While 66.7% is less than the 83.3% of participants with less than 3 years of experience who struggled, it does reverse the trendline from those with 6-10 years of experience and shows that there is not a simple linear correlation between experience, confidence and guidance. This suggests that the cause of the struggles with confidence and lack of guidance is not simply a lack of experience. Rather, they are likely the byproduct of a complex convergence of several factors and may have more to do with the specifics of each individual life history, rather than just the length of their work experience. This highlights the importance of understanding the nuances of the learning journeys and that the reasons members struggled with a particular challenge may not be easily distilled into a single variable.

Table 5.3

Personal Challenges with Self-management by Demographic Variables Where There was Notable Impact

		# of Participants	Weight	Fear	Informal Hierarchy	Confidence	Guidance	Overwork	Overwhelm	Prioritization
Age	**25-34**	9/15	55.56%	55.56%	55.56%	**77.78%**	**77.78%**	22.22%	22.22%	44.44%
Gender	**Female**	5/15	40.00%	**80.00%**	**80.00%**	**80.00%**	**80.00%**	20.00%	40.00%	20.00%
Cohort	**E-Controls**	4/15	50.00%	50.00%	50.00%	**75.00%**	**75.00%**	25.00%	25.00%	**75.00%**
	TalentGrow	4/15	50.00%	**75.00%**	**75.00%**	**75.00%**	50.00%	25.00%	25.00%	0.00%
Education	**Masters**	5/15	**80.00%**	20.00%	60.00%	20.00%	60.00%	20.00%	40.00%	20.00%
	Other	3/15	33.33%	66.67%	**100.00%**	66.67%	66.67%	33.33%	0.00%	33.33%
Location	**Europe**	4/15	50.00%	50.00%	**75.00%**	50.00%	75.00%	0.00%	50.00%	50.00%
Work Experience	**20+**	2/15	**100.00%**	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	50.00%	50.00%	0.00%
	under 3	6/15	50.00%	66.67%	66.67%	**83.33%**	**83.33%**	16.67%	16.67%	50.00%

Note: This table compares the number of participants who identified a particular challenge with the total number of participants within that category. 100% signifies that all participants within that demographic strata identified a particular challenge. Thus, demographic categories with only one or even two members are less notable than those with more participants and were not included. Percentages that seemed noteworthy due to their high number and overall number of participants have been bolded. See appendix for a full table that includes non-notable as well as notable percentage.

Another example is the impact of gender. Eighty percent of the female participants struggled with fear of judgment, informal hierarchy, lack of confidence, and lack of guidance. On its face, this can be explained by traditional female socialization, which increases social attunement and conflict avoidance and may decrease confidence and independence. However, the number of female participants was only 5 in total. It is also possible that this result (⅘) is entirely due to chance and not to specific characteristics of female participants.

These examples highlight some of the complexities involved and reinforces the need to be very cautious around drawing any conclusions due to demographics. However, these patterns do point to what may warrant further investigation—including the impact of age, experience, education, gender, and location on the challenges that new members face.

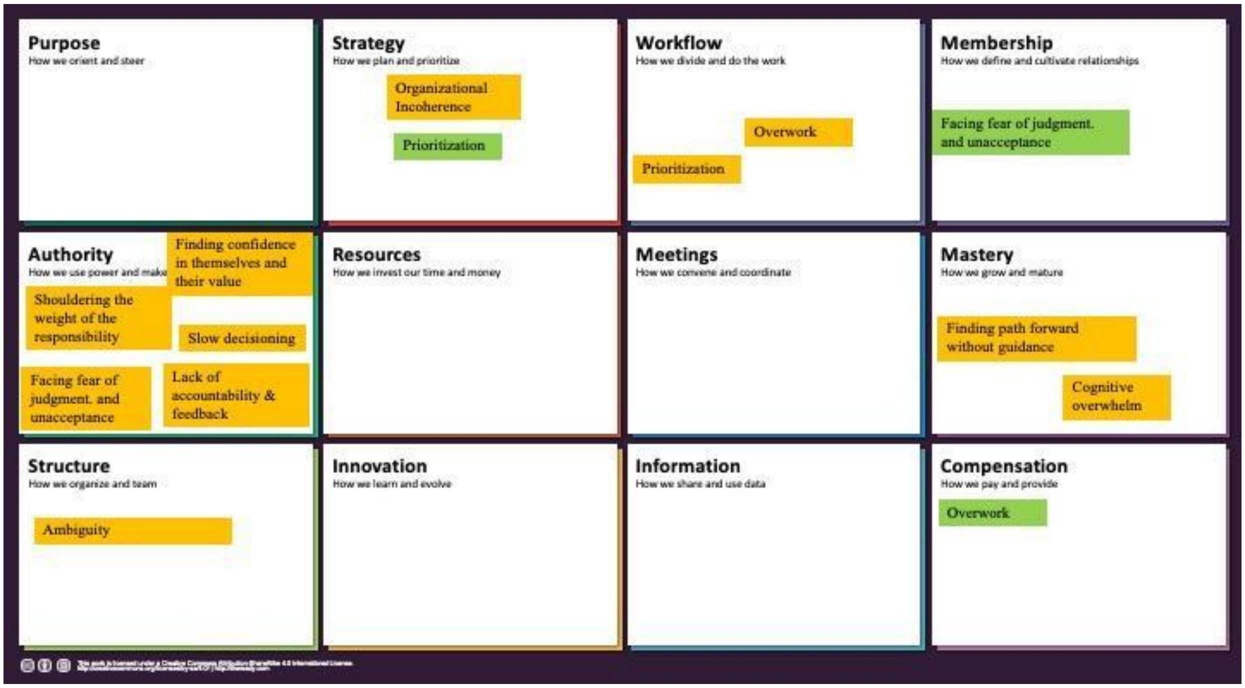
There were also nuanced differences in the interviews that are not captured in the table above. One important difference was between those participants who had previous managerial experience and those who did not. As noted in Chapter 4, Lowy, Sam, and Rob all had to unlearn some of their previously controlling behaviors and learn to trust others as part of their journey with self-management. This illustrates how relinquishing power can be even more challenging than stepping into it and necessitates significant mindset shifts to achieve.

Challenges Predominantly Reside Around Authority. Prominent organizational models, such as the Burke-Litwin model (1992), were designed to understand traditional hierarchal organizations and as such include components such as leadership and management practices that make them unsuitable for SMOs. Thus, to analyze the second part of RQ2, "Where within the organization did those challenges reside?" I utilized Dignan's (2019a) operating system (OS) canvas. The OS Canvas was designed to understand "Evolutionary Organizations" that are "pioneers in new ways of working" (Dignan, 2019b, "Brave New Work" section, para. 3). As a partner at The Ready and colleague of Dignan, I have also had lots of experience using the OS Canvas, which aided my analysis.

The OS Canvas analyzes an organization across 12 dimensions that are grouped into four columns. They are purpose, authority, and structure; strategy, resources, and innovation; workflow, meetings, and information; membership, mastery, and compensation. The dimensions are not mutually exclusive and often interrelate. When mapped against the OS Canvas (see Figure 5.1 below), many participant challenges fell into the authority bucket. Defined as "how we use power and make decisions" (Dignan, 2019a, p. 65), it is not surprising that this is where the most challenges reside. At its core, self-management is a shift in how power is held and distributed in organizations. As stated by Lee and Edmondson (2017), SMOs "radically decentralized authority in a formal and systematic way throughout the organization" (p. 5). However, as suggested by this analysis, changes in the organizational structure and the formal distributions of power are insufficient to manifest this shift. Despite being full members, many participants still struggled to actively take up their power (as described in Chapter 4) and required additional learning and support before they were able to do so. It is also worth noting that this is where most participants also felt the strongest benefits of self-management. This suggests that authority may be the most charged for new members, offering both great promise as well as complexity.

Figure 5.1

Personal and Organizational Challenges Mapped to OS Canvas


Purpose
How we orient and steer
Strategy
How we plan and prioritize
Organizational Incoherence
Prioritization
Workflow
How we divide and do the work
Overwork
Prioritization
Membership
How we define and cultivate relationships
Facing fear of judgment, and unacceptance
Authority
How we use power and make
Finding confidence in themselves and their value
Shouldering the weight of the responsibility
Slow decisioning
Facing fear of judgment, and unacceptance
Lack of accountability & feedback
Resources
How we invest our time and money
Meetings
How we convene and coordinate
Mastery
How we grow and mature
Finding path forward without guidance
Cognitive overwhelm
Structure
How we organize and team
Ambiguity
Innovation
How we learn and evolve
Information
How we share and use data
Compensation
How we pay and provide
Overwork

Note: Canvas areas are not meant to be mutually exclusive. Some challenges were mapped twice if they seemed relevant to two areas. Challenges mapped for a second time are colored green.

Moreover, all the challenges mapped to the far right row of the canvas illustrate the complexities of membership, mastery, and compensation that new members experienced. These areas of the canvas are focused on the people components within the organization. This pattern may be due to the lack of formal human resource support in many SMOs, or perhaps the greater complexities involved in the people side of the organization.

Similarities and Differences to What was Identified in the Literature. It is also interesting to note how these findings compare to the potential challenges identified based on the literature. These have been contrasted in Table 5.4 below, where many parallels are evident as well as some differences. Both will be explored in the subsequent paragraphs.

Table 5.4

Comparisons Between the Literature and Findings on the Challenges with Self-management

Challenges Suggested by the Literature	Challenges Identified by Participants	Implications
Psychological Challenges		
Need for external structure when there is less personal control (Friesen et al., 2014). Preference for hierarchy in practice even when not endorsed generally (Landu et al., 2015). Too much choice can be overwhelming (Schwartz, 2000) people favor lower status positions (Anderson et al, 2012). Most are insecure and dependent on external direction (Rosenberg, 2019b). Autonomy can lead to greater individual pressure (Harjanne, 2021) and burnout (Ryhänen, 2020).	Shouldering the weight of the responsibility (33.3%), Finding confidence in themselves and their value (53.3%), Overwork (33.3%), Prioritization (46.6%)	Overlap between the challenges participants named and possible causes identified in the literature. This suggests that competing psychological needs may underpin some of the participant struggles. Findings about overwork and possibility of overinvestment under represented in the literature and perhaps an area where more research is needed.
Biological and Evolutionary		
Preferences for followership because leadership carries risk of conflict and groups do better when some are followers (Bastardoz & Van Vugt, 2019).	Shouldering the weight of the responsibility (33.3%).	Literature may help explain participant reluctance to shoulder full responsibility despite espoused enthusiasm about self-management.
Cognitive and Developmental Challenges		
Most challenged by self-management because they are in instrumental or socialized states of development (Haslett, 2019). Need to unlearn old mindsets especially around power which is deeply embedded (Magee & Galinsky, 2008). Learning complex participatory methods while also onboarding can be overwhelming (Blumenthal, 2019; Caddel, 2016).	Cognitive overwhelm (33.3%), Finding path forward without guidance (53.3%).	Convergence between the experiences participants named and developmental and cognitive challenges identified in literature. This suggests that developmental and cognitive gaps may have contributed to participant challenges onboarding.

Table 5.4 (continued)

Challenges Suggested by the Literature	Challenges Identified by Participants	Implications
	Social Challenges	
Peer assessment leads to social pressure to conform (Foss & Dobrajska, 2015). SMOs are vulnerable to implicit hierarchies (Diefenbach & Sillince, 2011), invisible structure of exclusion and inequity (Mont, 2017), and uneven distributions of power (Harjanne, 2021). Power dynamics such as favoritism, inequity, and siloling have been documented (Spicer, 2018; Warr, 2013). Self management can lead to increased conflict (Langfred, 2007). Some feel more strain taking up leadership than others (Nissi, 2021).	Facing fear of judgment. and unacceptance by the collective (40%), Navigating informal hierarchy (46.6%),	Partial overlap with the literature. Added pressure and informal hierarchies were present, while power dynamics and conflicts were not. This suggests there may be something unique about these participants, or the period of onboarding, which makes it different from the general experience of self-management. Alternatively, the literature may be incorrect or incomplete.
	Organizational Challenges	
Slow decisioning (Klein & Foss, 2014, Ryhänen, 2020). Lack of accountability (Groen, 2018). Lack of clarity and shared strategy (Bernstein et al., 2016). Challenges with broader strategic issues (Olsson & Bosch, 2018).	Ambiguity (40%), Lack of Accountability & Feedback (40%), Organizational Incoherence (60%), Slow Decisioning (40%)	Overlap between the challenges participants named and those identified in the literature. This suggests that the organizational challenges experienced were due to their self-managing model.

Many of the findings did overlap with the literature. As explored in Chapter 2, there are many subconscious factors that may have influenced why new members struggled with self-management. It is not just that new members had to develop new capabilities. Rather, they had to overcome real subconscious resistance that can be rooted in protective psychological constructs and evolutionary history. While they may not have been fully aware of all these internal dynamics, they still could feel the effects. The challenges participants identified, such as "shouldering the weight" and "feeling confident," may be indicative of this impact.

Schwartz’s (2000) work on the paralysis generated by too many choices also helps explain some of the challenges participants had with prioritization. Additionally, the developmental frameworks (Drago-Severson et al., 2013; Kegan, 1994) add color to the struggles participants reported around overwhelm and that lack of guidance. As described in Chapter 2, those in an instrumental or socializing phase often subordinate their own needs or require direct guidance. It is only in the self-authoring stage that they have the capacity to take perspective, reflect on their own needs and those of others, and navigate the space between them (Drago-Severson et al., 2013). Kegan et al. (2016) argued that most workers are not self-authoring, and while exact percentages are not known, current research suggests that many are instrumental or socializing (Haslett, 2019; Kegan et al., 2016). Although members of an SMO are a self-selecting group, it is likely that not all the participants were self-authoring as they entered the SMO. This may have compounded the struggles they experienced and could have contributed to some of what participants described.

Regarding the research on social and organizational challenges, the literature on social pressures and dynamics aligned well with the fear of judgment and increased social pressure participants reported, as well as their experiences of informal hierarchies despite formal equality. Moreover, the organizational challenges reported were also nearly completely aligned with those proposed based on the literature. This suggests that they were also a product of self-management, rather than simply due to our small sample size, or idiosyncrasies of the specific participant organizations.

However, there were also two notable differences. First, the literature suggested that SMOs may have heightened levels of conflict and difficult group dynamics (as explained in Chapter 2). However, this did not emerge in my findings. Although, without more data, it is difficult to surmise why this was the case. The sample may have been too small, there may be something unique about these SMOs, or perhaps participants were just too new in their tenure to experience these dynamics. Second, my findings pointed to challenges with overcommitment and overwork, which are not well identified in the literature. This builds on Ryhänen (2020), who also identified overwork and the blurring of work/life as tensions experienced by members of an SMO. As I argued previously, these findings reinforce the understanding that new members within SMOs have complex experiences and are often gripped by paradoxical impulses. One such paradox is between the psychological factors that favor simplification and those that push them toward taking on too much work. In addition, as SMO members are a self-selecting group, it may be that they have greater levels of intrinsic motivation, which can also lead them to overwork.

Theme 2: The Learning Required to Successfully Onboard

Unique Learning Required

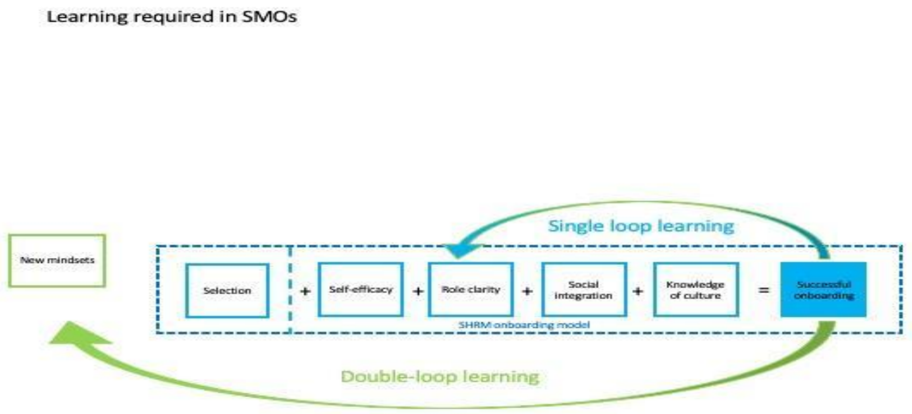
Many types of learning were required along the onboarding journey, but much of that learning was instrumental and not unique to SMOs. The learning required to meet many of the challenges with self-management was specifically double-loop learning (as documented in KF3). As described in Chapter 2, double-loop learning goes beyond problem solving to focus on examining and changing assumptions and mental models. As proposed by Argyris (1977), the challenging of assumptions and mental models changes the learning process from a linear one to one with multiple “loops.” These loops are triggered by a mismatch between an anticipated outcome and the actual result, which leads to the reexamination of assumptions and mindsets.

Argyris & Schon’s (1974) action science provides a useful framework for understanding the learning journey described in the findings. Initially, members went through “single-loop” learning to understand the mechanisms and process of self-management. However, this type of learning did not suffice, and they often struggled to make full use of self-management in practice. As documented in KF2, participants faced challenges such as "shouldering the weight," "finding confidence," and "fear of judgment," despite the official principles of empowerment and autonomy. Argyris's (1977) concept of the gap between espoused theory and theory-in-use explains how this discrepancy triggered deeper learning for participants. This deeper learning then led to the mindset shifts described in Chapter 4, KF3.

Argyris’s (1991) model overlaid on the traditional SHRM onboarding framework (Bauer, 2010) visually depicts this learning process. The SHRM model’s four critical onboarding levers described the instrumental learning members had to go through (see Chapter 2 for more detail on the SHRM model). Yet, this learning was insufficient to achieve the result of successful onboarding into an SMO. It was only through looping back and changing their assumptions that participants were able to make use of their knowledge of culture, social integration, role clarity, and sense of self-efficacy.

Figure 5.2

Integrated SMO Onboarding Model


Learning required in SMOs
Single loop learning
New mindsets
Selection
+
Self-efficacy
+
Role clarity
+
Social integration
+
Knowledge of culture
=
Successful onboarding
SHRM onboarding model
Double-loop learning

This also illustrates how onboarding into an SMO may be different from onboarding into a traditional organization. While some positions in a traditional organization can require double-loop learning, it is certainly not needed by all. This is likely why it is excluded in the Bauer (2010) model. However, within SMOs, the internalization of a new philosophy and frames of reference are a critical component of full socialization.

Specifics of the Mindset Shifts. To better understand the specific mindset shifts identified in KF3, I also compared them to those anticipated based on the literature in Chapter 2, as shown in Table 5.5.

Table 5.5

Comparisons Between the Literature and Research Findings on the Mindset Shifts Needed for Self-management

Mindsets Suggested Based on the Literature	Mindset Shifts Identified by Participants	Implications
Be ready to challenge your ego and to have it challenged by others. (Jansen, 2019) be without ego (Getz, 2019) and *solicit and give effective feedback* (Renkema et al., 2018).	Perfectionistic and preformative *to* Learning oriented and humble; Fleeing conflict *to* Being ok with tension	Strong overlap reinforcing the importance of a learning orientation and humble open stance.
B*e proactive* Elman's (2018) and *own your power and perspective*. (Robertson, 2015), state your needs (Dignan, 2019a),	Looking outside for approval and validation *to* Self-authorizing; Self-doubting and timid *to* Confident and trusting in value of their contribution; Waiting for others *to* Proactive; Limited sense of self and skills *to* Understanding of needs and grounded sense of abilities; Employee *to* owner	Many of the participant mindset shifts ladder up to the broader mindsets suggested in the literature. This implies that they may be prerequisites to the broader mindsets identified. Moreover, the shift from employee to owner was not in the literature, suggesting a gap similar to that around the challenges with overcommitment.

Table 5.5 (continued)

Mindsets Suggested Based on the Literature	Mindset Shifts Identified by Participants	Implications
Learn to *trust others and the system* (Dignan, 2019a; Janse, 2015).	Individualistic and opaque *to* Collaborative and open	The trusting mindset in the literature was also named by some of the participants. It is the belief that leads to the collaborative and open behaviors participants identified.
Pay attention to the process and invest in shared learning (Jansen, 2019).	Perfectionistic and preformative *to* Learning oriented and humble	There seems to be a link between the mindsets named by participants and the behaviors suggested by the literature. This suggests a reciprocal relationship between the two, which may be mutually reinforcing.

This comparison revealed many similarities. However, there were two notable differences. The first was regarding the shift from either/or thinking to both/and thinking. This was not referenced in the literature on SMOs, but does speak to the more complex thinking demanded by SMOs. This also pointed to the importance of understanding the developmental levels required for self-management. (See Chapter 2 for more on levels of development and self-management.) The specifics of the developmental level required and an analysis of how they may have changed throughout the onboarding process were beyond the scope of this research. Yet, they are worth further exploration to fully understand what is required for successful participation in an SMO.

The second difference was the mindset shift around valuing boundaries. This mindset shift spoke to the challenges many participants had with prioritization and overwork, as they found themselves having to navigate the boundary between themselves and the organization. While not yet explored in the literature, this finding emphasizes the importance of balance within an SMO. While freedom, empowerment, and ownership can be positive, too much can lead to members feeling overworked and burned out—especially as, within SMOs, roles are intentionally fluid and members are encouraged to "think like CEOs." In addition, SMO members are a small, self-selecting group and are likely to have high levels of internal motivation and commitment. For Jane, Sam, and others, the convergence of all these factors led them to struggle with maintaining healthy boundaries.

This finding raised many interesting questions. What should be the line between individual and organizational needs? Do SMO members struggle more with work-life balance? How, as Jane mentioned, may the misalignment between SMO empowerment levels (high) and compensation structure (salaried) be compounding this issue? Although these questions have not been resolved, the findings in KF3 do illustrate that new members have to navigate them and learn their way through as part of their onboarding journey.

Mindset Themes. A deeper analysis of the mindset shifts identified in KR3 reveal that they can be bucketed broadly into three themes.

Table 5.6

Mindset Shift Themes

Theme	Mindset Shifts
Stronger and more developed self	To ... Self-authorizing To ... Confident and trusting in value of their contribution To ... Understanding of needs and grounded sense of abilities To ... Valuing boundaries
Sensitive to nuance and open to other perspectives	To ... Collaborative and Open To ... Both/and thinking To ... Learning oriented and humble To ... Being ok with tension
Ownership and internalized sense of responsibility	To ... Owner To ... Proactive

The first theme was a more developed self. These shifts were focused inward and changed how participants viewed and experienced themselves and therefore how they contributed. The second theme was mindset shifts around how participants related to others. These were focused outward and enabled participants to step beyond their own perspectives and points of view.

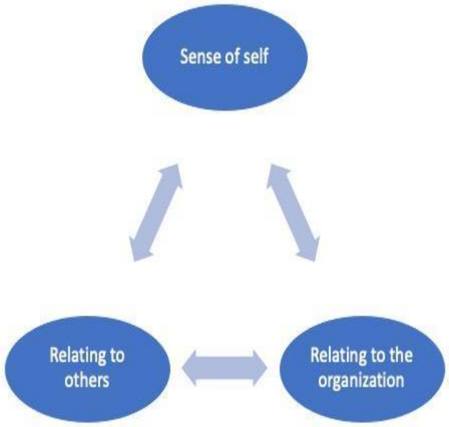
The tension between these two themes highlights the paradoxical nature of the learning new members undertook: to develop strong opinions and confidently propose them *and* to simultaneously be more willing to let go and be open to others. The movement toward self and that toward others had to be held at the same time. This challenged participants and stretched them toward higher levels of developmental complexity. As noted by Smith and Nicolaides (2018), ambiguity and complexity can drive development learning for adults who learn intentionally from their experience.

The third theme focused on how they related to the organization. These shifts changed how participants thought of themselves in relationship to the company and the responsibilities they therefore took up.

While not all participants had shifts in all three areas, these themes illustrate how the mindset shifts, while at times in tension with each other, were also mutually reinforcing. A stronger sense of self enabled participants to clearly state their points of view and to feel safe stepping beyond to hear from others—while a sense of ownership about the organization motivated participants to generate proposals and work with others toward the greater good.

Figure 5.3

Mindset Shift Themes



Application of Learning Theory. Mezirow's transformative learning helps explain the specifics of the mindset shifts participants went through. Mezirow (2012) differentiated between two components of the frames of reference that change during transformative learning—the habits of mind, or broad ways of thinking, and the points of view, or specific ideas that result from these habits.

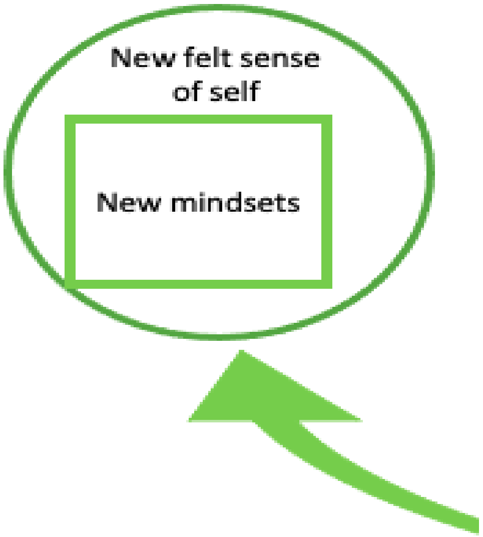
The learning described by KF3 went beyond just specific points of view to include broad habits of mind that shifted how participants generally made sense of the world. This was illustrated in many of the statements participants made. Sam identified the old point of view he once held—"If you want something done right, do it yourself"—and that he had to let that go. However, he also spoke to the broader idea of learning to trust people, despite how challenging it was at times to "trust 21-year-old servers to do something all the time."

As identified in KF3, this was also not just a cognitive shift but also an embodied one. Rob spoke of how he felt "that in my body," while Sam shared that he felt he still carried lingering imprints of his time in traditional organizations that were triggered in moments of anxiety. To understand the somatic component of this learning, we must lean on Dirkx's (2006) depth framework, which incorporates subconscious and embodied elements into the transformative learning journey. Dirkx emphasizes the importance of attending to one's feelings and sensations, amidst the learning, as an entryway into the subconscious and somatic elements that are also part of transformation. This approach takes a more holistic perspective that goes beyond just changing one's mindset to incorporate a new felt sense of self that integrates conscious, subconscious, and embodied experiences. The experiences of the participants seemed to corroborate this approach, as they described changes in beliefs and assumptions that were nested in a broader shift of self. This also aligns with how Nicolaides and Scully-Russ (2018) reframe informal learning, from focused solely on cognition to "embodied in a constellation of emotions, thoughts, sensations, as well as in relational, cultural, and physical entanglements" (p. 115).

Adding Dirkx (2006) and Nicolaides and Scully-Russ (2018) to our conceptualization of new members' learning broadens the conversation beyond just the cognitive and rational focus of Argyris (1991) and Mezirow (2012) to a more holistic view. As illustrated in Figure 5.4, this embeds the mindset shifts in a broader new felt sense. This aligned with some of the commentary from the focus group members who spoke about both the "head" and the "heart" transformations that were required for self-management.

Figure 5.4

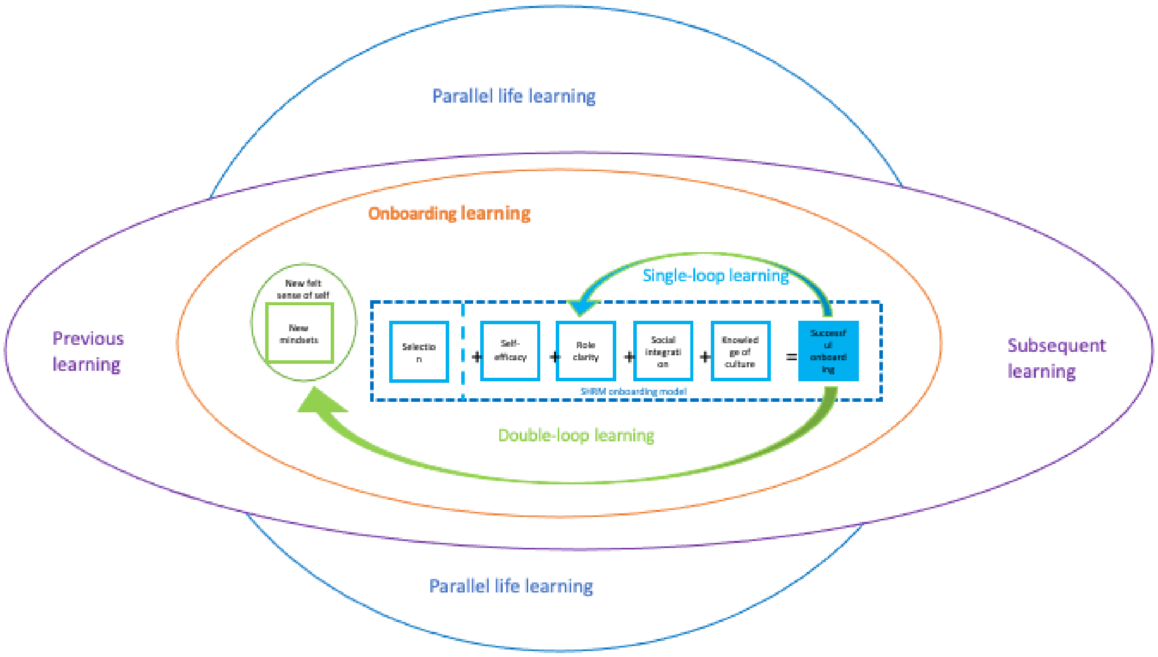
Mindset Shift Nested within Broader Shift of Self



Lastly, a deeper exploration of the participants' mindset shifts suggests that they were part of a process of lifelong and lifewide (Bélanger, 2016) learning. As explored in KF4, for many participants the seeds of this learning were sown many years prior to them joining an SMO. Their learning also bled into other aspects of their life and was enriched by them. Tim described a parallel process between his learning to trust others in the organization to assert whatever boundaries they need to protect themselves and how he began to reach out to his friends. Lowy spoke about how personal therapy helped him learn how it was unfair to expect others to read his mind. Bélanger’s vocabulary of lifelong and lifewide learning is useful because it provides language that reflects how participants' learning, while onboarding, was part of a larger tapestry. It also argues for the need to broaden the lens used during the onboarding period to include the learning that came before, will come after, and is happening in parallel. These various types of learning weave together and influence each other across domains and settings.

Figure 5.5

Nested Circles of Learning


Parallel life learning
Onboarding learning
Previous learning
New felt sense of self
New mindsets
Single-loop learning
Selection
Self-efficacy
Role clarity
Social integration
Knowledge of culture
Successful onboarding
+
=
SHRM onboarding model
Double-loop learning
Subsequent learning
Parallel life learning

Although a study of all the learning that happened prior and in parallel to onboarding is beyond scope of this work, it is worth further exploration, particularly as the link between selection and prior learning may help predict which members will have an easy time with onboarding.

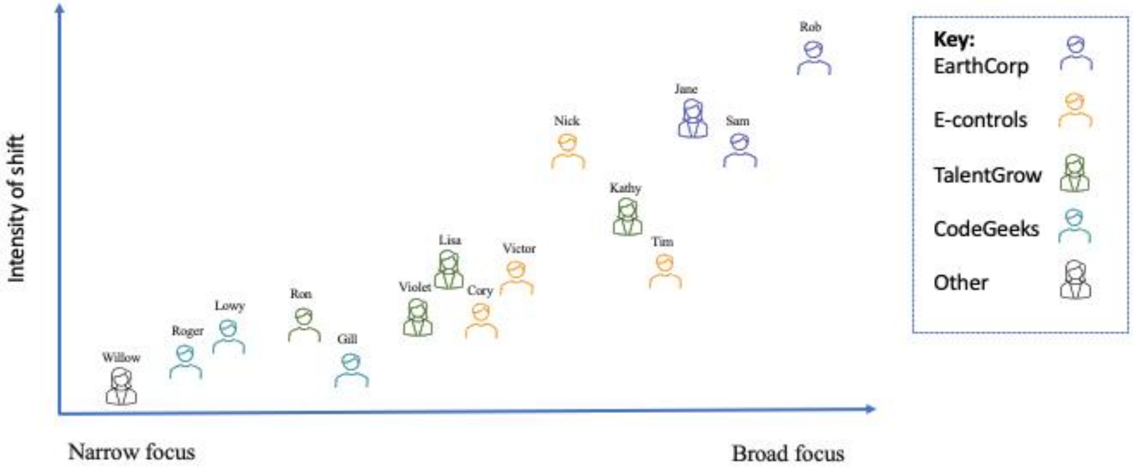
The finding (KF4) that participant learning was nonlinear is in line with Watkins et al. (2018), who emphasize that informal learning is iterative and nonlinear. This explains how Tim was able to take ownership in some areas while he still struggled to select a mentor, and why Nick was able to have a breakthrough self-authorizing, but still struggled with overwork. In addition, Nicolaides and Scully-Russ's (2018) critique of Dewey, and the idea of closure through reconstruction, provides a helpful lens with which to understand the experience participants described. While they noted important mindset shifts, by no means was their learning complete. As shared in KRF, Kathy still struggled with things feeling “weird,” Sam with the lingering “voices in the back of his head,” and Rob with his internalized “story.” Rather than a heroic journey with a climatic finish, the mindset shifts participants described were more along the lines of important pivots along the path of an ongoing journey. Their challenges were not always fully resolved, but managed and held differently. This echoes the words of Nicolaides and Scully-Russ (2018): "[L]earning did not lead them to a resolution. Rather, their learning enabled them to respond to challenges in ways that kept the situation open to new ways to live and learn within the ambiguity of paradoxical tensions" (p. 111).

Differences among Members and Cohorts. The analysis thus far has focused on the broad learning patterns that emerged in the findings. However, there were some important differences between participants and cohorts that require further exploration. Although all participants described double-loop learning, the range and intensity of the mindset shifts they experienced varied. Although hard to quantify, the tone, wording, and emotion in each interview comprise a gestalt that suggests different levels of change among participants. Some, like Rob and Sam, spoke emotively and at length, using words like “for most of my life,” “the deep learning,” and “that's always been”; while for others, like Roger and Lowy, the learnings they described were more gradual evolutions.

Moreover, the focus of the shifts differed as well. Some participants described a very broad focus, naming shifts in how they saw themselves and the world. Nick, for instance, pivoted from the hierarchical mindset of his native culture to confidently acting without approval or permission. For others, the shift was in a very specific area, such as Ron changing to be more proactive and Violet developing the confidence to reach out across organizational boundaries and face conflict head on when needed. The spread across the range of focus and intensity is charted in Figure 5.6 below. However, some important caveats must be made. Participant positions were estimated based upon the interview transcripts. It is possible that they would have self-identified differently. It may also be that some of the difference in length, tone, and emotionality were due to personality styles rather than the mindset shifts themselves. Yet, despite these limitations, Figure 5.6 does help illustrate the diversity of experiences with double-loop learning while onboarding.

Figure 5.6

Range and Intensity of Mindset Shift Described



The reasons for these differences were not readily apparent. One possibility is that they were due to the different organizational cohorts members were a part of. An analysis of the participant demographics and mindset shifts showed that the most impactful demographic was the distribution spread along cohort-based lines. Signified by different colors in Figure 5.6, participants from the same organization seemed to share similar ranges of breadth and intensity of their mindset shift. This suggests that there was something about the organizational context that influenced range and breadth, although what that factor may be is difficult to surmise.

At first glance, the distribution may be explained by the maturity of the organization and their self-management practice. Yet, while EarthCorp was the least developed, TalentGrow was significantly more developed than E-Controls, and they still seemed to have a similar distribution. Moreover, Willow’s org was also less developed in their self-management practice, yet she had the narrowest learning of them all. In Willow's case, perhaps things were unresolved to the point that she was still in the midst of her learning, rather than on the other side. In EarthCorp's case, perhaps despite their small size and relatively immature self-management practice, there may have been enough support there to enable learning. If that was the case, it would suggest that the broadest and most intense learning is generated by organizations that have just enough structure. That is, they are still in the process of developing their self-management practice, but have enough support and process that members are not completely lost. While too much chaos, as in Willow’s case, can stunt the learning.

Moreover, the specific mindset shifts did not seem to correlate to the cohorts in a meaningful way. This may imply that the distribution of intensity and breadth is due to another factor, or that the potency of the mindset shifts may be independent from the specifics of what was shifted. Could something about the organizational context explain the intensity and breadth of the shift, while not influencing the specific nature the shift takes? It is likely that a more accurate way of documenting the intensity and range of the mindset shifts will be needed before this question can be resolved.

What was Supportive

Need to Blend Formal and Informal Learning. Understanding what was supportive of participants' learning is important because it may point toward practices that can be replicated for others and partially account for some of the variation between members. KR5 directly addressed what was supportive of new members' learning and found that, while formal training supported instrumental learning, double loop learning was more supported by informal means. (See Chapter 4 for more about the various forms of informal learning that were supportive.)

However, while KF5 may suggest a rigid distinction between informal and formal learning, that was not necessarily always the case. Lisa first heard to be the "CEO of your role" during training, and Violet walked through a formal self-management curriculum with her coach. Their informal learning helped develop and nurture seeds that were first planted during those formal learning sessions. As argued by Marsick and Watkins (2018), "effective lifelong learning can only happen by blurring the boundaries that often now exist in program design between formal and informal learning" (p. 10).

This was the case for many participants, where the formal learning provided the material that was then applied, experimented with, and integrated through informal learning. Thus, while the formal learning did not lead to double-loop mindset shifts on its own, it was a supportive component. When successful, it provided the foundation for the future double-loop learning by teaching the processes and philosophy of self-management. Participants who lacked a strong understanding of the basic mechanism of self-management noted that their participation and development was stunted. As Cory shared, "The key learning [for new members] is to learn how we work and how we run our meetings and processes.... Learn the basics ... because that has caused me a lot of frustration."

This suggests that the most effective model is one that integrates both formal and informal learning—formal learning to teach the mechanism, vocabulary, and principles of self-management, and then informal learning to support members as they seek to actualize and implement those ideas. Nick advocated for this approach, as he differentiated between an "initial phase" where seminars and trainers can be useful and the "the actual things that we learn through time, and by trying it out ourselves." Participants who experienced this blended model had much less frustration with their onboarding and were able, therefore, to focus more of their energy and attention toward their broader mindset shifts.

Analysis of Informal Learning Methods. Participants' informal learning was supported and facilitated by various means. As reported in Chapter 4, the most significant were mentorship and coaching, learning through experience, group discussions, reflection, and modeling. These can be further subdivided into three general categories, as reflected in Table 5.7.

Table 5.7

Categories of Informal Learning

Dialogue with Others	Individual Processing	Direct Experience
• Mentorship and coaching • Group discussions	• Reflection	• Learning through experience • Modeling

The central role of dialogue in Mezirow's (1990) theory of transformative learning sheds further light on why participants found mentorship and group discussion so important—particularly as the nature of the reframe participants experienced was subjective (focus on self), which, as Mezirow noted, "often requires the support of others" (Dirkx et al., 2006, p. 125). It was through dialogue that participants made sense of their experience, explored possibilities, and challenged their assumptions. Roger shared that hearing "[y]eah, of course, you don't need to ask me, you, you can do it" was an important moment of realization for him. Lisa had a similar moment when she was told, "You need to stop using words like 'approve.'" These encounters mirrored back to Roger and Lisa their own behavior in a way that enabled them to begin to reframe their assumptions about authority.

In addition, dialogue helped provide the "secure environment" (Mezirow, 1990) that is needed for reframing strongly held beliefs or assumptions. Lowy described his mentorship as "a sense of safety and safe space," and Cory told of a "some kind of relief that we could have this one-on-one conversation discussing anything and there was no wrong questions or answers." Sam and others spoke about the "supportive[ness]" and "connectedness" that came from being able to discuss things together with his team.

Interestingly, despite the critical role self-reflection has in Mezirow's (1990) theory, it only seemed to play an independent role for a few participants. Roger spoke about "asking myself a lot of things," and Willow utilized a journaling practice. Yet, for the majority of participants, the reframing of their assumptions and frames of reference seemed to happen in the external world of relationships, discussions, and actions, rather than in the privacy of their own minds.

Their experience is better described by other learning theorists who focus on the social dimension of learning. As noted in Chapter 2, this includes Laidlaw (1962), who argued that mindset shifts around authority, responsibility, and self-discipline are by their very nature collective and as such "cannot be taught or learned in the abstract. They must become part of the personality of the individual and the experience of the group through actual situations" (p. 10).

A similar perspective was posited by Scully-Russ and Boyle (2018):

> [L]earning is a social process, and what is learned are socially and historically constructed knowledge and activities. Therefore, social relations are not factors, but the very source of informal learning in the workplace (Veresv, 2010) and learning, like many other human processes, is an intersubjective, deeply relational endeavor (Gergen, 2009). (p. 41)

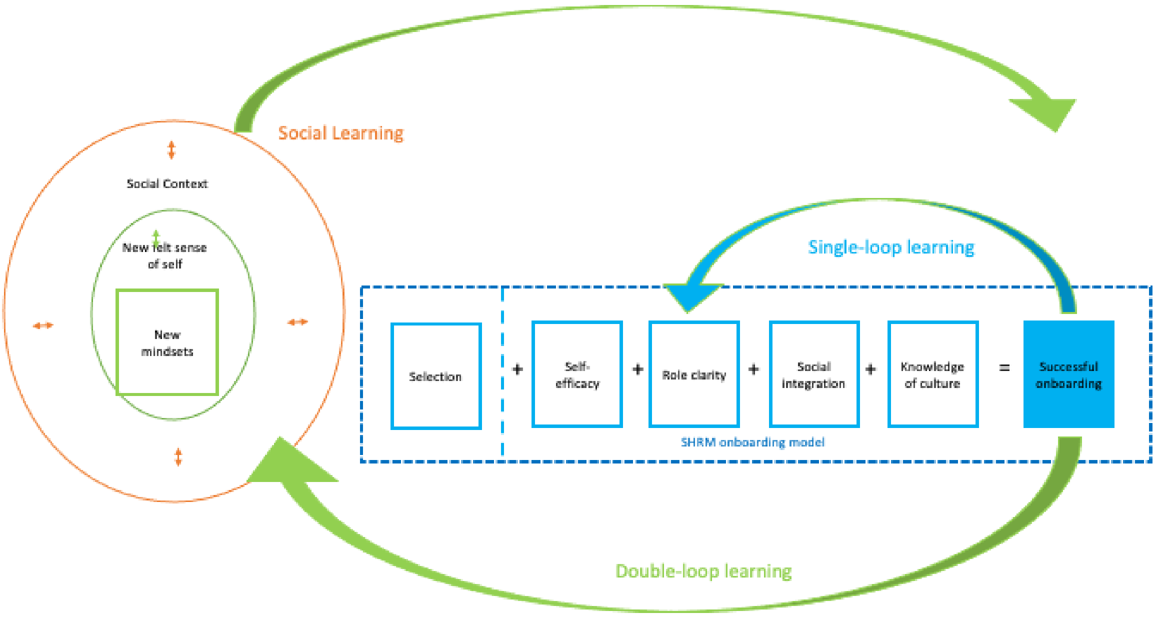
This was strongly reflected in the experience of many participants whose mindset shifts emerged amidst their interactions with others. Even the informal learning that developed from direct experience was, upon deeper examination, often reinforced and solidified by the social context. For example, Nick mentioned how, after he proactively made some decisions, he got “no complaints from anyone”; Victor shared how “the result of my efforts was just fantastic”; and Ron noted how teaching others really helped him internalize self-management.

Adding a social-learning dimension to the double-loop learning participants experienced goes beyond Argyris (1977), who framed the group as essential only as a means of making learning public (Watkins et al., 2018). However, it seems especially important for SMOs. Navigating power, authority, responsibility, and boundaries is a team sport and therefore must be learned with and through a team. Within an SMO, the group provides the context for people to engage with power in new ways and the feedback and modeling against which people can orient themselves (Bandura, 1977).

That is not to say that individual reflection did not also play an important role in supporting double-loop learning. Although it was only mentioned by a few participants explicitly, it is very unlikely that participants did not individually reflect on their experiences at any point during their learning journey. However, this individual reflection was subsumed by the social and experiential learning experiences discussed above. Techniques and tools to further support individual reflection amidst their social learning may be an area of opportunity for SMOs seeking to accelerate members' learning.

Figure 5.7

Integration of Social and Double-Loop Learning


Social Learning
Social Context
New felt sense of self
New mindsets
Single-loop learning
Selection
+
Self-efficacy
+
Role clarity
+
Social integration
+
Knowledge of culture
=
Successful onboarding
SHRM onboarding model
Double-loop learning

Summary of Analysis

This chapter analyzed the findings in Chapter 4 to gain a deeper understanding of the participant experiences and to develop a more holistic picture of the broader themes and patterns that were present. It was organized around two key themes. The first theme pertained to the experience of onboarding into an SMO and the unique challenges it raises. The second theme related to the learning required to overcome those challenges and the methods that supported them.

Exploring the first theme showed that participants' onboarding period was one of complexity. While participants experienced this differently, with some feeling more supported and positive than others, they were all stretched by their experience. Moreover, while Haslett (2019) proposed a dichotomous relationship between ownership and stress, these findings suggest that both were true. Participants felt both challenged and supported by self-management. Managing this paradox was part of their onboarding experience. This experience extended beyond their formal probationary period and for many participants was still partially unresolved. This suggested that the onboarding period extended beyond the initial phase many participants considered their onboarding.

What made the challenges identified unique to SMOs was not the feelings themselves, but how they were triggered and the span of those affected. While some demographics seemed to impact which challenges were experienced, the limitation of such a small sample size and the nature of the qualitative interviews suggest that these insights be held lightly.

Regarding where the challenges resided, the largest cluster was around authority. This was not surprising, as at their core SMOs are seeking to disrupt how power is distributed within an organization. However, these tensions illustrate that for the promise of SMO to translate into reality, significant obstacles must still be overcome.

Lastly, it was noted that the findings contrasted with the literature in a few important ways. While other SMOs have been documented to struggle with negative group dynamics and conflict, these participants did not. However, they did struggle with overwork, something that has not yet received much attention.

Analyzing the second theme illustrated three main categories among the mindset shifts identified: a changed sense of self, new way of relating to others, and new ways of relating to the organization. Having to navigate the tension between them is part of what drove participants' learning. To fully make sense of this journey, a variety of learning theories had to be integrated: Argyris & Schon’s (1974) double-loop learning and the SHRM onboarding model (Bauer, 2010) to depict the need for mindset shifts in addition to instrumental learning; Mezirow’s (1990) transformative learning to provide clarity around where the shifts took place: Dirkx (2006) and Nicolaides and Scully-Russ (2018) to broaden the transformation to include the subconscious and embodied elements; Watkins et al. (2018) to explain how it was nonlinear; and Nicolaides and Scully-Russ (2018) to describe how it can remain unresolved. Together these theories gave language to depict the rich, multilayered, and holistic learning journey that participants identified. Differences between different participants were also noted, particularly around the breadth and intensity of their learnings, and the need for additional research to fully explain them was noted.

The results also point to the overlap between formal and informal learning and the need to integrate between them. Three general categories of informal learning were identified: dialogue with others, individual processing, and direct experience. However, unlike Mezirow's (1990) depiction of transformative learning, it was noted that, for most participants, their reflection and learning happened engaging externally, rather than through critical reflection. Therefore, to understand this experience, a social-learning component to their double-loop had to be added. This was of particular importance within an SMO, where shifts in authority are at the core of the structural change and those shifts can only be practiced and experienced within a collective. Social-learning theorists such as Bandura (1977) and Scully-Russ and Boyle (2018) added additional insight and built upon Argyris's original conception of the role of the group.

Contributions to the Literature

This study contributed to the literature in several important ways. First, it built upon a number of studies (Harjanne, 2021; Lee & Green, 2022; Nissi, 2021; Ryhänen, 2020) that present a more nuanced view of self-management. This perspective celebrates the freedom self-management can enable, while also acknowledging the additional stress it can place on its members. Moreover, it is the only study that directly addresses onboarding into an SMO. Considering how different SMOs are from traditional organizations, the lack of any research on the learning required to onboard into self-management was a significant gap. This paper proposes a holistic model for this learning that integrates many disparate theories and can offer practical insight for SMOs seeking to improve their onboarding.

Second, this study integrates double-loop learning with onboarding. The link between the two has received scant attention in the literature and can offer lessons for many contexts beyond SMOs. This can include a broad range of transitions where mindset shifts are required, from new parents to someone making a career change. Third, this research expands our understanding of informal learning by providing specific examples of the iterative, nonlinear, and socially embedded nature this learning can take.

Lastly, while not all organizations are self-managing, many organizations are experimenting with flatter organizational structures in response to growing complexity worldwide (Bernstein et al., 2016; McKinsey, 2020). This study highlighted the learnings required to actualize these aspirations and reinforces the idea that organizational restructuring cannot be thought of in isolation. For a design to be successful, its members must be able to live into its principles, something that often requires mindset shifts as well as instrumental learning. Specific recommendations to support these mindset shifts will be suggested in the next chapter as well as implications for future research.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

Overview

This chapter discusses the conclusions and recommendations that were drawn from the findings and analysis in previous chapters. It begins with a short review of the study's purpose and research methodology, after which a summation of the findings leads to the primary conclusions and recommendations. This is followed by an examination of the assumptions listed in Chapter 1. Lastly, I share some personal reflections on the study, its findings, and the research process.

The purpose of this research was to study the learning required to onboard into a self-managed organization (SMO). To explore this, a qualitative study was conducted, and four primary research questions were posed:

RQ1: How did participants experience their onboarding?

RQ2: What unique challenges were present onboarding into self-management, and where within the organization did those challenges reside?

RQ3: What kind of learning was needed to help new members meet these onboarding challenges?

RQ4: What was supportive to new members learning as they onboarded?

These questions sought to understand the experience of onboarding into an SMO and the learning required to be successful within it. At their core they investigated self-management from the perspective of its members and focused on the individual transformation needed to support this bold organizational structure.

To begin to determine the answers to these questions, 15 in-depth interviews were conducted with members from a range of diverse SMOs. The data were then coded, analyzed, and organized into key findings. Additionally, a review of publicly available organizational documents and a focus group were used to solidify the findings.

An analysis of the findings revealed two key themes. The first theme pertained to the experience of onboarding into an SMO and the unique challenges it raised. The second theme related to the learning required to overcome those challenges and the methods that supported them. Based on these findings, a new model for SMO onboarding was proposed that combined multiple layers of learning into a single framework. It suggested that successful onboarding required members to engage in holistic double-loop learning (Argyris, 1977). This type of learning transforms not just their cognitive mindsets, but also their broader felt sense of self (Dirkx, 2006; Nicolaides & Scully-Russ, 2018). The model also suggested that this learning is enabled by the social context (Bandura, 1977; Scully-Russ & Boyle, 2018) and is never fully resolved (Nicolaides & Scully-Russ, 2018).

Conclusions

Based on these findings and subsequent analysis, five primary conclusions were determined. They are listed below and expounded upon in the ensuing narrative.

1. An organizational model cannot transcend the capabilities of its members.
2. A new relationship with self, others, and the organization required new ways of thinking and being.
3. Formal and informal learning experiences amidst a supportive social context enabled this holistic transformation.

4. Self-management is a team sport and is therefore likely only able to be learned with and through a group.
5. Onboarding is a time in which new members begin to learn how to manage these challenges and the mindsets they need to be successful despite them.

This study highlighted the promise of SMOs as well as the learning required to actualize their emancipatory structure. While it focused specifically on the experience of new members, its findings have broad implications for the understanding of self-management and other flat organizational models.

Despite the boldness of SMOs' innovative organizational design, the experiences of this study's participants illustrate the limits of structural innovation. *An organizational model cannot transcend the capabilities of its members.* Although structural authority was radically decentralized, new members faced challenges before they were able to fully take up this power. These challenges were mostly internal byproducts of deeply ingrained mindsets and assumptions that were much slower to change than the external organizational model. This finding mirrors Wesley (2023), who observed that empowering structures can only work "to the extent people feel power within themselves" (Episode 85, 22:20).

While some propose abolishing hierarchy as the panacea for all organizational ills, this research also demonstrated that participants still struggled with many of the traditional challenges of coordination and that self-management can exacerbate these struggles. Regardless of the organizational structure, people still need to learn how to collaborate, resolve conflict, and identify shared strategies and priorities. These activities require advanced facilitation skills and the mindsets to make use of them. Otherwise, people regress back to their more primitive defense mechanisms. As Argyris (2010) argued,

> The crucial reality that many of these approaches overlook—no matter how innovative they seem on the surface—is that they must all be implemented by human beings, who although they often espouse [collaborative] values and productive reasoning, usually retreat to the safety of [self-centered] values and a defensive mindset in action. (pp. 186-187)

Understanding the learning and development required to actualize self-managed structures also restores a more balanced perspective to the study of SMOs. Lewin (1946) defined behavior as a function of the person and the environment. A self-managing structure can trigger personal transformation, but personal transformation is needed to actualize self-management. As much of the literature on SMOs focused on the structural and procedural changes required (environment), the learning and development needed on the individual level (person) was neglected.

This focus on the external environment at the expense of internal development is a common pattern not unique to self-management. A similar dynamic was identified regarding the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). As argued by the Internal Development Goals (IDG) project,

> [W]hat has been largely missing is a keen insight into what abilities, qualities or skills we need to foster ... in working to fulfill the visions ... we talk far more about what ought to be done ... than we talk about how to build skillfulness among the actors who are in a position to make the visions happen. (2021, p. 3)

On a much broader scale, this pattern—focusing on external structures and solutions at the expense of the internal human development needed to actualize them—can have national implications. While much effort has been expended in fostering democracy worldwide, "over the past decade, one in six democracies has failed" (Dimond, 2019, para. 1). Could one of the factors contributing to this failure be a focus on the external structures and mechanisms of democracy at the expense of the development needed to foster democratic values, attitudes, and mindsets?

Within SMOs, a critical component of this internal development was the double-loop learning (Argyris & Schon, 1974) required to unearth old mindsets and ways of thinking. This is of particular importance within SMOs, as traditional hierarchical mindsets are so deeply entrenched. Public schooling socializes hierarchy from an early age (Meshchaninov, 2012), and most organizations operate based on hierarchical principles.

Initially proposed as a rational and cognitive process, this study expanded the double-loop learning to include shifts in new members' sense of self. This more holistic perspective integrated somatic and subconscious elements that were also transformed throughout this process. It was not just members' rational minds that had to change to fully participate in self-management. *A new relationship with self, others, and the organization required new ways of thinking and being***.** This broad view encompasses many of the intangibles, like posture, tone, and attitude, that are often products of the subconscious, providing a window into more primal parts of the self.

Moreover, as illustrated by this study, *what enabled this holistic transformation was a series of formal and informal learning experiences amidst a supportive social context.* Formal learning helped teach the mechanisms of self-management. This was an important precursor to participation, as the initiated often underestimate the amount of complexity required to understand all the processes and terminology utilized by SMOs. However, it was the informal learning—the peer coaching, group discussions, and mentorship—that assisted participants to shift their mindsets. This informal support guided new members toward self-managing behaviors and helped them reflect as they made sense of their experience.

Yet, informal support alone did not suffice. Authority, autonomy, and power are all inherently deeply social concepts. New ways of relating to others, themselves, and the collective were not learned in private reflection, but from and amidst the group. Seeing others model new behaviors, experimenting themselves, and receiving feedback all helped participants begin to integrate and internalize the new mindsets they required for self-management. *Self-management is a team sport and is therefore likely only able to be learned with and through a group.*

However, even when these new mindsets were learned, members' challenges were not fully resolved. Although some of their anxieties did lessen over time, some of the underlying paradoxes they had to navigate remained. As suggested in the literature review, some of these challenges can be explained by psychological and cognitive factors. On a subconscious level, autonomy and authority can feel unsafe and developmentally out of reach.

While participants were able to develop new mindsets and learn new behaviors, some of these original dynamics remained, creating competing commitments new members had to contend with. Learning to live with this tension and to manage some of the paradoxes that emerged was at the core of the development participants described. They learned to manage the added responsibility and to develop boundaries when needed. They developed a stronger sense of self, while also learning to be more open to others. They advocated for their own needs, while also advancing the needs of the collective.

Rather than conceiving of onboarding as a time during which all these challenges were fully resolved, it is more accurate to conceptualize *onboarding as a time in which new members learned how to begin to manage these challenges and the mindsets they needed to be successful despite them*. Self-management is a practice. While one can become more skilled with experience, one’s learning is never finished. This was reinforced by the participants who were still grappling with aspects of self-management, despite mastering others. While there may be a minimum level of development required to successfully participate, there are an infinite number of growth opportunities as people progress within their self-management practice.

Recommendations for Practice

Although self-management is an ongoing practice, there are techniques and policies that can accelerate new members' learning and support their personal transformations. While some of the participants experienced significant shifts without them, it is hypothesized that they may have progressed further and had a smoother transition with additional support. The recommendations that follow are drawn from the conclusions above and are based on adult learning theory, research into SMOs, literature on vertical development, and my own experience as a practitioner. Fundamentally they divide into two categories—building a learning environment and supporting new members' learning journey—both of which are outlined in Table 6.1 and will be explained below.

Table 6.1

Recommendations for Practice

Build a learning environment	Support new members learning journey
1. Structural change must be complemented by a learning plan that is resourced and developed. 2. Leverage developmental models to create a shared language and support progress. 3. Develop a learning culture. 4. Establish informal support networks	1. Set the right expectations. 2. Utilize formal training to teach principles and processes of self-management. 3. Balance the internal stress new members experience with additional external clarity and scaffolding 4. Maximize social learning (especially for remote teams). 5. Offer a holistic menu of practices that integrate imaginal and somatic techniques.

Build a Learning Environment

The first set of recommendations is organizational in nature and intended to foster a learning environment prior to new members' entry. While they can be pursued independently, they build on each other and are exponentially more effective when implemented together.

(a) ***Structural change must be complemented by a learning plan that is resourced and developed.*** When planning to launch an SMO or to adopt self-management, many organizations invest a lot of resources deciding the model of self-management they will utilize, the processes they will use, and the systems they will establish. While these are all important, equal time must be spent on the learning that will be required. Some questions that must be explored include:

  (i) What are the key values and principles of the organization?
  (ii) What capabilities and mindsets are required to actualize those principles?
  (iii) How will these capabilities and mindsets influence recruitment and hiring?
  (iv) What are the ways in which they will support member learning and reflection?
  (v) What rituals, practices, and norms will they utilize to foster a learning culture?
  (vi) What commitments are required to enable ongoing learning and development?

(b) ***Leverage developmental models to create a shared language and support progress.*** There are several developmental theories that are very valuable for SMOs. See Petrie (2015b) for a list of recommended developmental models. These models provide descriptions of each stage and sometimes also offer assessment tools that can be used to help members identify their current developmental level. The specific descriptions and examples can help members understand what their next stage of development entails and can also provide a shared language that deepens the reflective discourse members have with others in the organization. Moreover, there are coaching techniques and training associated with many of these models, which can enhance the peer-coaching many SMOs provide. SMOs' informal learning would be even more effective if the peer-coaches, onboarding buddies, and mentors were familiar with vertical development and had some training in how to support members' developmental progress.

(c) ***Develop a learning culture.*** More broadly, there are additional things organizations can do to develop a learning culture. Some examples include deliberately telling stories about mindset shifts, embedding personal and task-related reflective processes into the workflow, establishing a feedback practice, and normalizing the struggles to bridge the gap between self-management theory and practice. These practices lean heavily on storytelling, as narratives are a key way organizational culture is built. As the current environment is saturated with hierarchical narratives, SMOs must deliberately nurture an alternative culture, values, and norms. These cannot just be said once during an orientation, but must be reinforced in multiple ways throughout the course of the work week.

(d) ***Establish informal support networks.*** Although informal learning can occur spontaneously, it can be difficult to find guidance in the moment it is most needed. Pre-existing networks help to ensure that these learning moments are maximized. Some specifics include an onboarding buddy system, peer-coaching process, mentorship pairing, and team-based learning and reflection sessions. While the content of these sessions should be organic to what is currently needed, formalizing and protecting these spaces ensures that they are there when required. Moreover, the repeated practice of learning and reflection enhances the individual and group's learning abilities.

Support New Members' Learning Journey

These recommendations aim to nurture and sustain individual members' development as they adjust to self-management. While they will not mitigate the struggles and complexities of socializing to a different set of mindsets, assumptions, and values, they can help facilitate a smoother process.

(a) ***Set the right expectations.*** Moderate the utopian rhetoric that is sometimes used when discussing self-management. Be clear about both the opportunity and the added cost of self-management. Throughout the recruitment and hiring process, provide prospective members with a realistic sense of the additional stresses self-management can entail and the personal learning it will require.

(b) ***Utilize formal training to teach principles and processes of self-management.*** Designate specific times for the learning of self-management and create resources that can be referenced throughout the onboarding period. Documentation (handbooks, wikis, guides), classes, and simulations all help new members learn the mechanics of self-management and the many different terms and methods used within SMOs.

(c) ***Balance the internal stress new members experience with additional external clarity and scaffolding.*** Transitioning into self-management requires a significant adjustment. Anticipate the cognitive and emotional load this will place on new members and adjust the tasks and responsibilities they are introduced to accordingly. Decrease external ambiguity, where possible, by clearly scoping roles and projects and allocating sufficient resources.

(d) ***Maximize social learning (especially for remote teams).*** Make key decision moments highly visible, reflect in public, and lower the bar for active participation in governance.

If utilizing digital governance platforms (such as Loomio or Murmur) or discussion threads (such as Slack or Microsoft Teams), provide in-person/video-based opportunities for new members to also receive more holistic non-verbal feedback and affirmation within the governance process.

(e) ***Offer a holistic menu of practices that integrate imaginal and somatic techniques.*** Some examples include:

  (i) The Immunity to Change (Kegan & Lahey, 2009) coaching model and other practices to name competing commitments and reflect on them.
  (ii) Personality indicators such as the MBTI or the Enneagram to identify personal biases and preferences.
  (iii) Bodyscans and other somatic techniques to bring the body into awareness.
  (iv) Imaginal techniques (Dirkx, 2012) such as working with art to bring the subconscious into awareness.
  (v) Polarity mapping (Cox, 2018) to help learn to hold multiple perspectives.

Recommendations for Future Research

Throughout the course of this study, some important gaps in the literature were identified and the need for additional study in several areas was highlighted. They include:
(1) Understanding Individual Self-management Fit, (2) Self-management Maturity Modeling,
(3) Organizational Enablement, (4) SMO Retention, (5) and The Criticality of Social Learning.

Understanding Individual Self-management Fit

While there has been a significant amount of research on self-managing systems and structures, much less is known about the individuals who are best suited for self-management. Is self-management for everyone? Are some people more suited for it than others? As discussed in

Chapter 2, it is likely that self-management requires advanced levels of development. However, this has not yet been empirically verified. Additionally, the impact of joining an SMO on individual development is also not yet fully understood. Can joining an SMO accelerate members' vertical development? Or do the participatory processes and scaffolding that many SMOs employ mitigate the need for more advanced development?

In addition to developmental levels, other demographic variables also warrant further study. The results of this study's limited sample suggest that gender, age, and work experience all play a role in the challenges new members experience. Participants' previous experiences also played an important role in their learning journeys, and in some cases served to prepare them for self-management. However, it was not possible to determine whether these effects were anecdotal or significant.

Further research on the developmental levels required for successful participation in SMOs and possible demographic criteria to consider can help SMOs target their recruitment and selection of new members. Additionally, this research can help those contemplating joining an SMO evaluate whether they may be a good fit.

Self-management Maturity Model

This study revealed some shared challenges and the mindset shifts needed to overcome them. However, a more comprehensive survey is needed to ascertain the prevalence of these patterns. Are there specific mindsets or abilities that are essential for success in self-management, or identifiable stages through which newcomers progress to reach the requisite capabilities? The possibility of developing a maturity model for self-management warrants further investigation. Such a model has the potential to yield valuable insights for both individuals and the SMOs they are a part of. This research laid the foundation for such an inquiry by highlighting the importance of double-loop learning during socialization and identifying what some of the key shifts may be. However, further study is needed to validate these findings and to develop a comprehensive model.

Organizational Enablement

Participants identified specific organizational practices that enhanced and supported their learning, such as a phased approach to members, informal support, and a culture of trust. These experiences contributed to the recommendations listed earlier in this chapter. However, it has not yet been established whether there is a direct correlation between specific organizational practices and new members' socialization and performance. Additionally, it remains to be seen which specific practices have an outsized effect on member development and performance. Finally, it is unclear how much of a participant's success can be attributed to their personal characteristics versus organizational factors.

Given these uncertainties, additional research is necessary to provide a more nuanced understanding of the impact of organizational enablement on the internalization of self-management. Such research could explore the specific practices and behaviors that are most effective in promoting member development and could also examine the relative importance of individual versus organizational factors in new member success. Furthermore, this research can help begin to delineate where the boundaries between personal and organizational responsibility for vertical development and double-loop learning lie. Many of the shifts described in this study were deeply personal and at times rooted in participants' formative experiences. Particularly with some of the more holistic somatic and imaginal practices, the lines between therapy and professional development can blur. A deeper understanding of the components of organizational enablement will assist SMOs to define the boundary that is most appropriate for their context.

SMO Retention

While it was hypothesized that the additional challenges of self-management make onboarding into an SMO difficult, the impact of this on SMO retention remains unknown. How do SMO retention statistics compare to those of traditional organizations? Do the additional freedoms offered by SMOs counterbalance the challenges of self-management? What percentage of new members fail to successfully socialize? A much larger study will be required to begin to answer these questions.

In addition, more research is needed to understand the reasons members leave an SMO. What percentage is due to the challenges posed by self-management? If socialization challenges are a contributing factor, does an organization's learning culture or individual members' double-loop learning mitigate these challenges?

Deeper insights into the reasons why members leave SMOs, and how common this pattern is, could be valuable to individuals evaluating whether to join an SMO or adopt self-management. Are there situations in which it is not worth the added stress, or when struggles can be anticipated? This information could help individuals understand when the tradeoff between freedom and responsibility is worthwhile and when it may not be worth the effort.

The Criticality of Social Learning

Social learning emerged as a critical factor in participants' internal development. Modeling helped enable the mindset shifts they required to self-manage, and feedback helped reinforce new patterns and uproot old habits. However, it remains unclear whether social learning is universally critical to self-management socialization, and further research is warranted to explore this issue in diverse contexts.

This assumes even greater significance considering the growing reliance on remote work and the consequent shift toward digital governance and communication tools, such as Loomio, Murmur, Slack, and Microsoft Teams. These tools, while highly efficient and convenient, often rely heavily on written text and asynchronous collaboration, potentially limiting, or even eliminating, many critical social cues, such as tone, body language, and real-time adjustment of responses.

An extreme example of this are some Distributed Autonomous Organizations (DAOs) that operate with complete anonymity via text-based platforms (Brook, 2023). What is the impact of minimum social feedback on member socialization into self-management? Are there any benefits to additional distance between members? Can people internalize a new relationship to authority in environments with limited social interaction? Addressing these questions is critical as digital governance and coordination continues to gain prominence.

Revisiting Assumptions

Revisiting the initial assumptions listed in Chapter 1 is a useful way to reflect upon this study's findings (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Each of the four assumptions are listed below and assessed in light of this study’s actual findings and analysis.

There is a shared experience of onboarding into self-management that differs from traditional onboarding, but is common across a diverse range of SMOs. This assumption was supported by the findings. Although participants were drawn from a range of different organizations that spanned across industries, geographies, and sizes, they had similar experiences. Across the board, new members grappled with actualizing aspects of self-management and had to engage in double-loop learning to shift some of their underlying mindsets and beliefs. While there were some differences between cohorts, particularly around the quality of their formal learning and intensity of their learning journeys, there was a shared experience that was common between them.

Participants can accurately report on their experiences with onboarding into an SMO. This assumption was partially supported by this study. Despite a range in tenure, participants were able to speak to their onboarding experience in detail. However, they were not always so accurate in their portrayal of their experience. For example, one participant characterized his mindset change as a singular shift, only to acknowledge some things he was still struggling with later in the interview. This suggested that his perspective deepened through the dialogue, and he came to recognize things about his learning journey that he may have not been fully aware of when we began. Therefore, in addition to the specific member statements, I sought to analyze each interview holistically, as additional clarity often emerged through the interview process. In addition, I utilized active listening techniques, such as mirroring and probing, to elicit more nuanced responses when participants seemed to need assistance verbalizing their experience.

Successful onboarding into an SMO requires learning. This assumption lay at the heart of this study and was substantiated by the findings. While the range and intensity of the learning differed, all participants reported engaging in both single and double-loop learning in order to successfully participate in self-management. In addition, many participants spoke of the unlearning of old mindsets and behaviors that was required for them to step into their authority and autonomy. This suggests that learning is a critical component of the onboarding experience and that multiple forms of learning were required.

New members consciously pursue learning as part of their onboarding process and are conscious of what they learned, the strategies they used, and the factors that facilitated

their learning. This assumption was partially supported by the findings. Some of the learning members described was consciously pursued and rationally processed. However, there was also incidental and cumulative learning that members gleaned from the general context, observing others, and adjusting their behavior based on feedback. This was particularly evident in new members' social learning, which often resulted from an accumulation of multiple interactions and observations, rather than a specific strategy or effort.

Furthermore, participants tended to frame their experiences in a narrative form and did not necessarily associate all their mindset shifts with a particular learning strategy or experience. Although some participants did not explicitly identify their learning as such, they were still able to provide sufficient detail about their learning journey. This allowed the identification of the learning they engaged in, the strategies they employed, and the factors that facilitated their learning.

Personal Reflections

While this study is primarily based upon the experiences of the 15 participants I interviewed, in retrospect I see how it is also a reflection of my own learning journey. As a qualitative researcher, I sought to acknowledge and utilize my own experience, and it served as a lens through which I made sense of the patterns that emerged.

I began my career working in educational reform, advocating for teacher empowerment as a critical component of educational transformation (Meshchaninov, 2012). Yet, I now have much more respect for the complexities involved. After over a decade working across a broad spectrum of organizations and industries, I have seen both the amazing power of freedom and autonomy as well as some of its limitations. I have also had the privilege of working in an SMO for the past 6 years, and I have experienced both for myself.

I have learned that not everything can be solved by giving people more freedom. Like with many things in nature, the key is harmony—finding the right point between freedom and structure; chaos and being stifled. As this research progressed, the story that emerged is one of integration and paradox—being able to hold opposites, to sit in the liminal spaces. That is what led to many of the most profound shifts participants described. It is this energy that we need if we are to resolve our most pressing problems.

These findings suggest that radically abolishing all hierarchy is just as unlikely to lead to meaningful progress as a top-down master plan. What we need is humility, ongoing learning, and the matching of solutions to context. Most of all we need to understand that the changes we desire can't just be external. It is not just the structures or the models that have to change. If we want a more sustainable, adaptable, and human workplace, we too need to evolve. After all, we carry ourselves wherever we go.

This learning carries me back to my time in Talmudical seminary. We are rediscovering old truths that have already been carried for thousands of years. In the words of Ben Zoma, "Who is strong? He who masters his inclination" (Ethics of Our Fathers, 4:1). It is not the external strength that the ancient sages celebrated, but internal mastery.

In the 21st century, it is often at work where this saga plays out. We spend much of our time, energy, and attention at work. Especially in this moment of ambiguity, complexity, and change, work is often the crucible where our foibles, limitations, constricted mindsets, and expired narratives emerge. "Work among all its abstracts, is actually intimacy, the place where the self meets the world" (Whyte, 2015, p. 241). How we respond in those moments is what will make all the difference.

This study is a culmination of several years of research and exploration, and yet, in a sense, it is also a homecoming—bringing me back to truths that we as a human family have known for millennia. We can't design our way to the promised land. While external organizational innovations are necessary, they are not sufficient. All their promise can only materialize if we change alongside our organizational constructs. While this study only scratched the surface, I believe it demonstrates the importance of this learning and development amidst the work of reinventing organizations. It is my hope that this research helps catalyze continued conversation about the human development needed to actualize our amazing potential. Together there is so much that can be accomplished!

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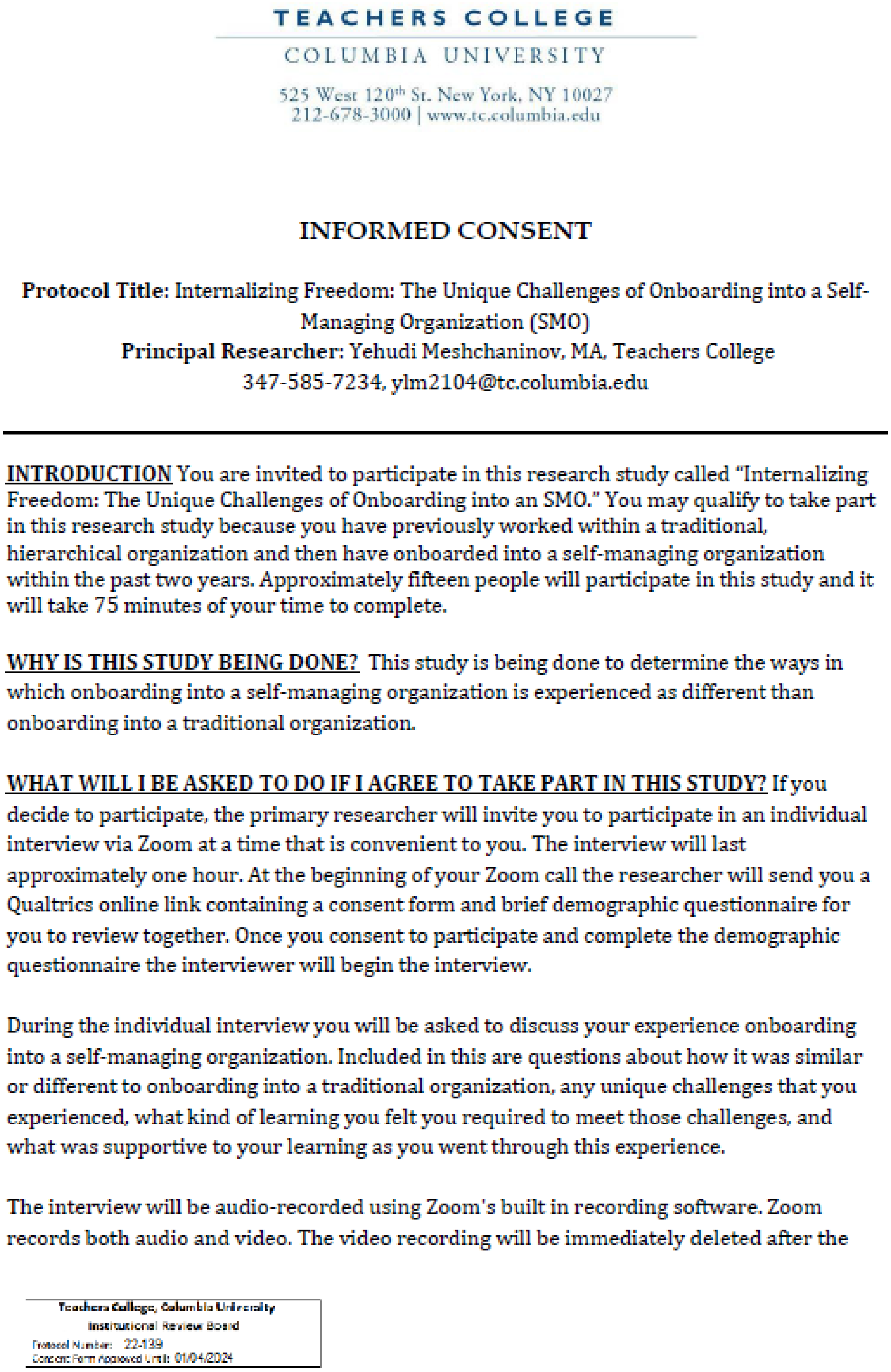
Appendix A: Informed Consent



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INFORMED CONSENT

Protocol Title: Internalizing Freedom: The Unique Challenges of Onboarding into a Self-Managing Organization (SMO)
Principal Researcher: Yehudi Meshchaninov, MA, Teachers College
347-585-7234, ylm2104@tc.columbia.edu

INTRODUCTION You are invited to participate in this research study called "Internalizing Freedom: The Unique Challenges of Onboarding into an SMO." You may qualify to take part in this research study because you have previously worked within a traditional, hierarchical organization and then have onboarded into a self-managing organization within the past two years. Approximately fifteen people will participate in this study and it will take 75 minutes of your time to complete.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE? This study is being done to determine the ways in which onboarding into a self-managing organization is experienced as different than onboarding into a traditional organization.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO IF I AGREE TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY? If you decide to participate, the primary researcher will invite you to participate in an individual interview via Zoom at a time that is convenient to you. The interview will last approximately one hour. At the beginning of your Zoom call the researcher will send you a Qualtrics online link containing a consent form and brief demographic questionnaire for you to review together. Once you consent to participate and complete the demographic questionnaire the interviewer will begin the interview.

During the individual interview you will be asked to discuss your experience onboarding into a self-managing organization. Included in this are questions about how it was similar or different to onboarding into a traditional organization, any unique challenges that you experienced, what kind of learning you felt you required to meet those challenges, and what was supportive to your learning as you went through this experience.

The interview will be audio-recorded using Zoom's built in recording software. Zoom records both audio and video. The video recording will be immediately deleted after the

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interview is completed. If you prefer, you may keep your camera turned off so your video is not recorded. The audio recording will then be transcribed for analysis and kept in a password secure file, in case portions of the transcript are garbled, or the tone and inflection are needed for deeper understanding. After the transcripts are all analyzed, the audio recording will be deleted.

If you do not wish to be audio-recorded, you will not be able to participate. If you choose to be audio-recorded, the researcher will notify you when the audio-recording is started and stopped. The interview itself will take approximately sixty minutes. You will be given a pseudonym in order to keep your identity confidential.

WHAT POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? This is a minimal risk study, which means the harms or discomforts that you may experience are not greater than you would ordinarily encounter in daily life while discussing your experiences with friends or colleagues. However, there are some risks to consider. You might feel embarrassed to discuss problems that you experienced onboarding into a self-managing organization. You do not have to answer any questions or share anything you do not want to talk about. You can stop participating in the study at any time without penalty. You might feel concerned that things you say might get back to others in your organization. Your information will be kept confidential.

The primary researcher is taking precautions to keep your information confidential and prevent anyone from discovering or guessing your identity, such as using a pseudonym instead of your name and keeping all information on a password protected computer and locked in a file drawer.

WHAT POSSIBLE BENEFITS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study. Participation may benefit the field of Adult Learning and Leadership to better understand the best way to support onboarding into self-Managing Organizations.

WILL I BE PAID FOR BEING IN THIS STUDY? You will not be paid to participate.

WHEN IS THE STUDY OVER? CAN I LEAVE THE STUDY BEFORE IT ENDS? The study is over when you have completed the face-to-face interview via Zoom. However, you can leave the study at any time even if you have not finished.

PROTECTION OF YOUR CONFIDENTIALITY The primary researcher will keep all written materials locked in a desk drawer in a locked office. Any electronic or digital information (including audio and video recordings) will be stored on a computer that is password protected. What is on the recordings will be written down and the recordings will then be destroyed after the analysis. There will be no record matching your real name with your pseudonym.

For quality assurance, the study team, the study sponsor (grant agency), and/or members of the Teachers College Institutional Review Board (IRB) may review the data collected from you as part of this study. Otherwise, all information obtained from your participation in this study will be held strictly confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by U.S. or State law.

HOW WILL THE RESULTS BE USED? This study is being conducted as part of the dissertation of the primary researcher. In addition, the results of this study may be published in journals and presented at academic conferences. Your identity will be removed from any data you provide before publication or use for educational purposes. Your name or any identifying information about you will not be published.

CONSENT FOR AUDIO AND OR VIDEO RECORDING Audio recording and video recording is part of this research study. (Although the video will be deleted immediately after the interview is complete.) You can choose whether to give permission to be recorded. If you decide that you don't wish to be recorded, **you will not be able to participate**

WHO MAY VIEW MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY

___I consent to allow written materials viewed at an educational setting or at a conference outside of Teachers College, Columbia University

____
Signature

The primary researcher may wish to contact you in the future. Please initial below to indicate whether or not you give permission for future contact.

The researcher may contact me in the future for information relating to this current study:

Yes ____________________ No____________________
Initial Initial

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WHO CAN ANSWER MY QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY?

If you have any questions about taking part in this research study, you should contact the primary researcher, Yehudi Meshchaninov, MA . at 347.585.234 or at ylm2104@tc.columbia.edu You can also contact the faculty advisor, Dr. Victoria Marsick at marsick@tc.columbia.edu

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you should contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (the human research ethics committee) at 212-678-4105 or email IRB@tc.edu or you can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120th Street, New York, NY 10027, Box 151. The IRB is the committee that oversees human research protection for Teachers College, Columbia University.

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS

- I have read the Informed Consent Form and have been offered the opportunity to discuss the form with the researcher.
- I have had ample opportunity to ask questions about the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits regarding this research study.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw participation at any time without penalty.
- The researcher may withdraw me from the research at the researcher's professional discretion
- If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to continue my participation, the researcher will provide this information to me.
- Any information derived from the research study that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
- **Personal** Identifiers may be removed from the data. De-identified data may be used for future research studies, or distributed to another researcher for future research without additional informed consent from you (the research participant or the research participant's representative). ***OR*** Your data will not be used in further research studies.
- I should receive a copy of the Informed Consent Form document.

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My signature means that I agree to participate in this study:

Print name: ____ **Date:** _________________

Signature: ____

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Appendix B: Demographic Survey

Demographic Survey Questions*

1. How would you describe your gender?
    a. Male
    b. Female
    c. Non-binary/third gender
    d. Prefer not to say

2. What is your age?
    a. Under 15
    b. 16-24
    c. 25-34
    d. 35-44
    e. 45-50
    f. Over 50
    g. Prefer not to say

3. What is the highest level of education you have achieved?
    a. Master's degree or above
    b. Bachelor's degree
    c. High school
    d. Other (with blank entry field for the participant to self-identify)
    e. I prefer not to say

4. How many years have you been working in organizations?
    a. Under 3
    b. 3-5
    c. 5-10
    d. 11-15
    e. 16-20
    f. 20+

5. How long have you been working in a self-managing organization?
    a. Under 3 months
    b. 4-6 months
    c. 7-12 months
    d. Less than 2 years
    e. 2-5 years
    f. 5+ years

**Adapted from Qualtrics*

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Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Interview protocol

Yehudi Meshchaninov Protocol ID 22-139

General Introduction
Welcome and thank you for your participation today. My name is Yehudi Meshchaninov and I am a graduate student at Teachers College, Columbia University conducting this study as part of my dissertation research. The purpose of this research is to explore the unique experience of onboarding into an SMO and how it is similar and/or different from onboarding into a traditional organization.

We will begin by reviewing the consent form and brief demographic survey. I will send you a link in the zoom chat and then walk you through the specifics. This should take us approximately 10 minutes to complete. After which, if you consent, we will begin the interview. The interview will take about 60 minutes and will be focused on your experience onboarding into a self-managing organization (SMO).

Any questions before I send you the link to the consent form? <send link and review consent form and demographic survey>.

Interview Introduction
Thank you again for agreeing to participate in this study. As referenced in the consent form I will be recording this interview. If at any time during the interview you wish to discontinue the use of the recorder please feel free to let me know. As mentioned in the form this recording will remain confidential and will be used to develop a better understanding of the unique experience of onboarding into a self-managing organization. I will get us started by asking you several questions. There are no right or wrong or desirable or undesirable answers. I would like you to feel comfortable with saying what you really think and how you really feel. If you would like to take a break or stop the interview at any time please feel free to say so.

Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin? Then with your permission we will begin the interview.

Interview Questions
This will be a semi structured interview and these interview questions are intended to be a starting point for further exploration. Question specific probes are listed alongside each question with additional general probes listed below.

1. How has your experience been onboarding into the SMO?
    a. Probe: In which ways has it been similar to onboarding experiences you have had in traditional organizations?
    b. Probe: In which ways has it been different from your experience onboarding in a traditional organization?
    c. Probe: What was most challenging for you?

   d. Probe: What was easiest for you?
   e. Probe: Which part of your work did this most impact?
2. How did you learn to adapt?
   a. Probe: Where did you feel you had to learn something new?
   b. Probe: What kind of learning was helpful?
   c. Probe: How did you learn that?

3. What was helpful to you throughout this process?
   a. Probe: What supported your learning?
   b. Probe: What other kinds of support were helpful?
   c. Probe: What kind of support did you wish you had?

Additional general probes:
- “What do you mean when you say . . .?”
- “Why do you think . . .?”
- “How did this happen?”
- “How did you feel about . . .?”
- “What happened then?”
- “Can you tell me more about X?”
- “Can you please elaborate?”
- “I’m not sure I understand X. . . . Would you explain that to me?”
- “How did you handle X?”
- “How did X affect you?”
- “Can you give me an example of X?”

Appendix D: Focus Group Protocol

Focus Group protocol

Yehudi Meshchaninov Protocol ID 22-139

General Introduction
Welcome and thank you for your participation today. My name is Yehudi Meshchaninov and I am a graduate student at Teachers College, Columbia University conducting this study as part of my dissertation research. The purpose of this research is to explore the unique experience of onboarding into an SMO and how it is similar and/or different from onboarding into a traditional organization.

We will begin by reviewing the consent form and brief demographic survey. I will send you all a link in the zoom chat and then walk you through the specifics. This should take us approximately 10 minutes to complete. After which, I will invite those who consent to stay on the zoom for our focus group discussion. The discussion will take about 60 minutes and will be focused on understanding the experience of onboarding into self-managing organizations. I will share several key ideas that emerged from my one-on-one interviews and I am looking forward to hearing how they resonate with your experiences and those of others you have observed around you.

Any questions before I send you the link to the consent form? <send link and review consent form and demographic survey>.

Discussion Introduction
Thank you again for agreeing to participate in this discussion. You were all selected to participate because you have at least 2+ years experience working within a self-managing organization and can provide a perspective of more tenured members. As referenced in the consent form I will be recording this. This recording will remain confidential and will be used to develop a better understanding of the unique experience of onboarding into a self-managing organization. That said, as there are several people participating in this discussion I cannot guarantee that everything you say here today will remain strictly confidential. But I do ask that we commit to each other to not share anything that was said here today outside of this group without consent.

I will get us started by sharing several ideas that emerged from my interviews and asking if they resonate with your own experiences. There are no right or wrong or desirable or undesirable answers and there may be different points of view with the group. I would like you to feel comfortable with saying what you really think and how you really feel. You don't need to agree with others, but I ask that you listen respectfully as others share their views. If you would like to take a break or step out of the discussion at any time please feel free to do so. My role as moderator will be to guide the discussion, but the intent is for you to all talk to each other.

Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin? Then with your permission we will begin the discussion.

Discussion prompts:

1. Some newer members of SMO's found X to be true. How does that resonate with your own experience or experiences you have observed in others?
2. What might you have experienced in your onboarding that was not mentioned by newer SMO members, but you found particularly important in helping you adapt and integrate into an SMO?

Additional general probes:

- Asking specific members to "tell me more," "what happened after," or "give me an example."
- Mirroring back to the group "what I am hearing you say is."
- Call out different perspectives I am hearing, "sounds like there are several perspectives here some feel X and others Y."

Appendix E: Final Coding Scheme

Codes listed in alphabetical order by parent code. Subcodes are listed under parent codes

Primary Code	Subcode	# of participants	Frequency
Benefits of self-management		13	40
Benefits of self-management	Positive feelings	1	1
Challenges with self-management		15	281
Challenges with self-management	Confusing at first	7	10
Challenges with self-management	Doesn't always live up to the hype	1	1
Challenges with self-management	Longed for support	10	19
Challenges with self-management	Org Challenges With self-management (Ambiguity, assertiveness, conflict, cost of collaboration, group think, lack of accountability, lack of feedback, on one owning whole, incoherence, unclear expectations, unstructured onboarding)	14	64
Challenges with self-management	Personal Challenge (Anxiety about performance, fear of being seen, informal hierarchy, lack of confidence, lack of guidance, loss of role based community, negative feelings, over responsible, overwhelming, prioritization, seeking permission, self criticism, spread thin, vulnerable, vulnerability hangover)	15	82
Differences than traditional onboarding		8	9
Double-Loop Learning	(Authority trauma, balancing btw polarities, ok with ambiguity, beyond a hierarchical culture, building connection, gradual learning, difficult conversations, humble, learning orientation, letting go of control, space for others, mindset shift, not needing permission, ownership, proactive, self-advocate, setting boundaries, standing on your own, trusting self, unlearning, validation from	15	190

Primary Code	Subcode	# of participants	Frequency
	positive experience)		
Formal Onboarding		10	20
Learning strategies		13	49
Learning strategies	Advice to be successful	10	16
Learning strategies	simulations	1	1
Onramp		6	12
Onramp	Limitations of part time membership	5	6
Org context		12	19
Org context	Size of org	9	10
Single Loop Learning		15	49
Single Loop Learning	Formal training	13	19
Single Loop Learning	New skills needed	5	7
Single Loop Learning	time management	2	2
Useful background		14	39
Was supportive		15	60
Was supportive	Coaching	6	10

Appendix F: Personal Challenges with Self-Management by Participant

Name	**Shouldering the weight**	**Facing fear**	**Overcoming informal hierarchy**	**Finding confidence**	**Finding path forward**	**Overwork**	**Cognitive overwhelm**	**Prioritization Spread thin**
Kathy		x	x	x				
Lisa	x	x	x	x	x			
Violet		x	x	x	x			
Ron	x					x		
Willow				x	x			
Sam						x		x
Rob	x							
Jane		x	x		x	x		x
Tim		x	x	x	x			
Nick				x	x	x		x
Victor	x		x		x		X	x
Cory		x		x			X	x
Gill								x
Roger				x	x			x
Lowy	x						x	
Total	5/15	6/15	6/15	8/15	8/15	5/15	3/15	7/15

Appendix G: Personal Challenges With Self-Management By Demographic Variable

		# of Participants	**Weight**	**Fear**	**Informal Hierarchy**	**Confidence**	**Guidance**	**Overwork**	**Overwhelm**	**Prioritization**
Age	**25-34**	9/15	55.56%	55.56%	55.56%	**77.78%**	**77.78%**	22.22%	22.22%	44.44%
	35-44	5/15	20.00%	20.00%	40.00%	20.00%	20.00%	60.00%	40.00%	60.00%
	50+	1/15	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%
Gender	**Female**	5/15	40.00%	**80.00%**	**80.00%**	**80.00%**	**80.00%**	20.00%	40.00%	20.00%
	Male	9/15	44.44%	22.22%	33.33%	44.44%	44.44%	44.44%	22.22%	66.67%
	Other	1/15	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%
Cohort	**CodeGeeks**	3/15	33.33%	0.00%	33.33%	33.33%	33.33%	33.33%	33.33%	66.67%
	E-Controls	4/15	50.00%	50.00%	50.00%	**75.00%**	**75.00%**	25.00%	25.00%	**75.00%**
	EarthCorp	3/15	66.67%	33.33%	0.00%	33.33%	33.33%	66.67%	33.33%	66.67%
	Other	1/15	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%
	TalentGrow	4/15	50.00%	**75.00%**	**75.00%**	**75.00%**	50.00%	25.00%	25.00%	0.00%
Education	**High school**	1/15	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%
	Bachelors	6/15	16.67%	50.00%	16.67%	83.33%	50.00%	50.00%	33.33%	83.33%
	Masters	5/15	**80.00%**	20.00%	60.00%	20.00%	60.00%	20.00%	40.00%	20.00%
	Other	3/15	33.33%	66.67%	**100.00%**	66.67%	66.67%	33.33%	0.00%	33.33%
Location	**Europe**	4/15	50.00%	50.00%	**75.00%**	50.00%	75.00%	0.00%	50.00%	50.00%
	North America	7/15	57.14%	57.14%	42.86%	57.14%	42.86%	42.86%	28.57%	28.57%
	Other	1/15	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	0.00%	100.00%
	South America	3/15	33.33%	0.00%	33.33%	33.33%	33.33%	33.33%	33.33%	66.67%
Work Experience	**20+**	2/15	**100.00%**	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	50.00%	50.00%	0.00%
	16-20	1/15	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%	100.00%
	11-15	3/15	33.33%	66.67%	66.67%	66.67%	66.67%	0.00%	66.67%	33.33%
	6-10	3/15	33.33%	0.00%	33.33%	33.33%	33.33%	66.67%	33.33%	66.67%
	under 3	6/15	50.00%	66.67%	66.67%	**83.33%**	**83.33%**	16.67%	16.67%	50.00%

		# of Participants	Weight	Fear	Informal Hierarchy	Confidence	Guidance	Overwork	Overwhelm	Prioritization
Experience in an SMO	**>24**	3/15	33.33%	0.00%	33.33%	33.33%	33.33%	66.67%	33.33%	66.67%
	< 24	5/15	40.00%	40.00%	20.00%	60.00%	60.00%	20.00%	60.00%	60.00%
	7-12	5/15	60.00%	40.00%	60.00%	40.00%	60.00%	40.00%	0.00%	40.00%
	4-6	1/15	0.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%
	<3	1/15	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%

Note: This table compares the number of participants who identified a particular challenge with the total number of participants within that category. 100% signifies that all participants within that demographic strata identified a particular challenge. Thus demographic categories with only one or even two members are less notable than for those with more participants. Percentages that seemed noteworthy due to their high number and overall number of participants have been bolded

Appendix H: Organizational Challenges with Self-Management by Demographic Variable

		# of Participants	Org Ambiguity	Accountability	Incoherence	Slow
Age	**25-34**	**9/15**	11.11%	33.33%	66.67%	44.44%
	35-44	**5/15**	60.00%	60.00%	60.00%	40.00%
	50+	**1/15**	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Gender	**Female**	**5/15**	20.00%	60.00%	**100.00%**	60.00%
	Male	**9/15**	33.33%	33.33%	44.44%	33.33%
	Other	**1/15**	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Cohort	**CodeGeeks**	**3/15**	0.00%	0.00%	33.33%	66.67%
	E-Controls	**4/15**	25.00%	25.00%	50.00%	25.00%
	EarthCorp	**3/15**	66.67%	66.67%	66.67%	33.33%
	Other	**1/15**	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	0.00%
	TalentGrow	**4/15**	25.00%	50.00%	**75.00%**	50.00%
Education	**Bachelors**	**6/15**	16.67%	50.00%	66.67%	33.33%
	High school	**1/15**	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%	100.00%
	Masters	**5/15**	**80.00%**	40.00%	40.00%	0.00%
	Other	**3/15**	0.00%	33.33%	66.67%	**100.00%**
Location	**Europe**	**4/15**	50.00%	25.00%	75.00%	25.00%
	North America	**7/15**	42.86%	57.14%	71.43%	42.86%
	Other	**1/15**	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%
	South America	**3/15**	0.00%	0.00%	33.33%	66.67%
Work Experience	**11-15**	**3/15**	33.33%	33.33%	**100.00%**	66.67%
	16-20	**1/15**	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	0.00%
	20+	**2/15**	100.00%	50.00%	0.00%	0.00%
	6-10	**3/15**	0.00%	33.33%	33.33%	66.67%
	under 3	**6/15**	16.67%	33.33%	66.67%	33.33%
Experience in an SMO	**< 24**	**5/15**	20.00%	40.00%	**80.00%**	60.00%
	<3	**1/15**	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%	100.00%
	>24	**3/15**	33.33%	33.33%	0.00%	33.33%
	4-6	**1/15**	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%
	7-12	**5/15**	60.00%	60.00%	60.00%	20.00%

Note: This table compares the number of participants who identified a particular challenge with the total number of participants within that category. 100% signifies that all participants within that demographic strata identified a particular challenge. Thus demographic categories with only one or even two members are less notable than for those with more participants. Percentages that seemed noteworthy due to their high number and overall number of participants have been bolded

Appendix I: Mindset Shifts by Participant

	Mindset shift 1	Mindset shift 2	Mindset shift 3	Mindset shift 4
Kathy	Stop looking for approval and validation	Stop updating from place of anxiety	Be more confident	Importance of building human connection.
Lisa	Finding balance between improvement and stability. Seeing what is possible and team and where they are at	Learning others perspectives	Being ok with difference, conflict	Stop looking outward for approval
Violet	Facing her fear, feeling safe in the group	Confidence to reach out to others and other teams	Changing her mindset about feedback and failure. More learning orientation	Facing conflict head on.
Ron	Reframing feedback as an opportunity. Not just cognitively but somatically	Seeing honest picture and owning his choice	Being proactive	Understanding his own value
Willow	Internalizing a circle structure	comfort with all that ambiguity	x	
Sam	Learning how to work with others. (After lots of time as a solo farmer). Both self-advocacy and asking for help. And caring for others point of view	Setting boundaries and not taking it all on his own shoulders.	Learning to let go of control and trust others and the process	Feeling safe. Letting go of PTSD
Rob	Letting go of control while working with others	Cont.	Makings space for people amidst a burning platform and purpose	
Jane	Self confidence and trust in her voice	Seeing the bigger picture and navigating multiple needs btw the whole and her role	Learning about self and skills, desires, needs	Boundaries and balance
Tim	You are on your own.	Humbling. Asking, and not knowing	Confidence to reach out	

	Mindset shift 1	Mindset shift 2	Mindset shift 3	Mindset shift 4
Nick	Self authorizing and not waiting for permission. Especially in a Indian culture	Confident in reaching out to others.	Developing a learning orientation. Embracing a mindset of continuous learning and being ok with failure	
Victor	Expand horizons of what is possible	Be proactive. Own your life	Breaking out of cultural hierarchical mindsets	Realization that his own mindset is only thing holding him back and that it can change
Cory	Speak up	Own his own needs and wants	Summary	x
Gill	Learning to speak up	What is leadership in an SMO	Direct yet trusting	x
Roger	Saying no. managing his own time	Confidence in his work and value	Understanding others	Stopping to ask permission.
Lowy	Learning to trust others and the process	Learning to communicate	Cont. trust	x

Note: mindset shifts that seemed similar were color coded in the same color