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A Workers Perspective On Hierarchical Organization Structure And The Potential For Non-Hierarchical Management Systems

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Submitted to the Program of Organizational Dynamics, College of Liberal and Professional Studies in the School of Arts and Sciences in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in Organizational Dynamics at the University of Pennsylvania

Advisor: John Eldred, Ph.D.

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A Workers Perspective On Hierarchical Organization Structure And The Potential For Non-Hierarchical Management Systems

Abstract

My participation in the Organization Dynamics program has been quite the odyssey, as has my work career at the University of Pennsylvania. Since I was working full time at the School of Dental Medicine, it took me many years to complete the program. My Capstone theme is an explanation of the hierarchical management structures that I have worked within and an exploration of the potential of non-hierarchical systems.

Most of the world, and the people working in it, are very familiar with hierarchical management systems. I will explore a few instances of the emergence of non-hierarchical management organizations in this paper, comparing my career experience to the organization models that I investigated. As my participation in non-hierarchical management systems is limited and, I want to discern the differences between what I have experienced and what I could have realized if non-hierarchical structures were used as the structure for business organizations. Is it possible for non-hierarchical management systems to become the more dominant form of organizational structure in the modern workforce?

My methodologies for the exploration are a literature review of management systems contrasting the differences between hierarchical and non-hierarchical organization structures. Another important component is an analysis and reflection of my own career experience, comparing what I learned in the literature review to what I have experienced in real life. I will additionally report findings in a non-hierarchical organization in which I participated recently. My final method is the analysis of a survey I conducted to determine if non-hierarchical organizing is being utilized.

In summary, my findings show that hierarchical management structures are the de-facto standard in business and organizations today, and we are a long way from changing to non-hierarchical modes. However, some methodologies and processes that I have explored will become more prevalent going forward.

Keywords

hierarchical management, non-hierarchical management

Comments

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Advisor: John Eldred, Ph.D.

A WORKERS PERSPECTIVE ON HIERARCHICAL ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE
AND THE POTENTIAL FOR NON-HIERARCHICAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

by

Joseph T. Breslin

Submitted to the Program of Organizational Dynamics,
College of Liberal and Professional Studies
in the School of Arts and Sciences
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Master of Science in Organizational Dynamics at the
University of Pennsylvania

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

2020

A WORKERS PERSPECTIVE ON HIERARCHICAL ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE
AND THE POTENTIAL FOR NON-HIERARCHICAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

Approved by:

John Eldred, Ph.D., Advisor

Alan Barstow, Ph.D., Reader

ABSTRACT

My participation in the Organization Dynamics program has been quite the odyssey, as has my work career at the University of Pennsylvania. Since I was working full time at the School of Dental Medicine, it took me many years to complete the program. My Capstone theme is an explanation of the hierarchical management structures that I have worked within and an exploration of the potential of non-hierarchical systems.

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I have had a life-long interest in humanities and studying for the sake of simply learning more about myself and my role in the world, rather than just acquiring professional knowledge and credentials that would go to structuring my career path. Fortunately, the Organizational Dynamics program combines both educational paths. The courses I took were delivered by the faculty with passion and a keen emphasis on the human, the person, as a dynamic and changing component of the world in which they live - and the work that they do in that world - and for that I am grateful.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I, like many persons, have worked my entire adult life. My career activity has been in support of Information Technologies (IT) – primarily in the role of a desktop support technician. I worked for various industries such as banking, finance, retail sales, health, and education industries. I have always had a supervisor, who had a manager, who had a director, who had a vice president or school dean at the top of the management hierarchy. After working more than forty years in my career I am still a ‘worker’ working for a supervisor under the same management pyramid listed above.

Throughout my work life I have always heard talk of “climbing the corporate ladder”. I have had the impression that working within a hierarchical structure for 40 years would result in a normative progression through the management ranks. I expected that at some point I would have been promoted to supervisor, in charge of directing others in the best ways to provide technical solutions and improve customer support. After a few years in that role I would have become a manager of a department in charge of multiple supervisors, with increased responsibility for expanding duties such as programming and marketing, as well as customer support. Then I would be a director and so on. But as I look back on my 40-year career I have found that none of this happened; I have not seen it happen for others either. I wonder if it is all an illusion.

The following paper is an explanation of the journey through my career and an analysis of why I did not experience career success as defined by promotions. I propose that the structure of hierarchical management that is prevalent across industries creates a

framework for career stagnation. There are only so many moves people can make in their careers; room at the top and space to make your way “up the ladder” is very limited. I will explore options for non-hierarchical management and test to see if there was another course my career could have taken.

This paper includes content that is derived from my personal experience to exemplify hierarchical management. Chapter 2 contains an exploration of my career and how those experiences relate to hierarchical management. In Chapter 3 I conducted a literature review of hierarchical systems from a historical perspective, in addition to a review of the components required to conduct business operations in a non-hierarchical organization structure. Chapter 4 comprises of an analysis and comparison of my career to the results from the literature review. Next, I explain my experience as a participant in a non-hierarchical organization. Finally, I provide an explanation of a survey I conducted to understand if the participants have experienced non-hierarchical methodologies in their career.

CHAPTER 2

REFLECTIONS ON MY PERSONAL WORK-LIFE EXPERIENCE

Early Work Experience

This chapter is a comprehensive listing of all the jobs I had and an explanation how my experience within these positions has shaped my understanding of my role within hierarchical management structures. I started work while I was still in high school at a neighborhood company called Wilcox, Walter, Furlong Paper Co. My father worked for this company and was their union steward. My brother worked an afterschool job in the company computer room, and I took over this job from him. I was responsible for stocking paper for the computer printing and running a machine that sorted punch cards before they were fed into the computer system as data entry.

In this job, as many others I would go on to have in my career, I was also responsible for “other duties as assigned”. In the few years I worked after school in this position I started to get supplies for many other departments in the company. I remember everyone was always pleased with my responsiveness to their needs. I was soon taking on increased responsibility for jobs that were not within the original scope for which I was hired. I was doing work that my manager was not completely aware of, but I was hustling and able to complete the tasks he needed me to do as well as many other tasks requested by the other staff.

Already in my first job I experienced two things that occurred again and again in my career. One was scope creep, where tasks would come to me by virtue of my willingness to learn and do them. Throughout my career I found I was doing many different duties

by a sort of osmosis – tasks become “owned” by me just because I developed and executed solutions for completing them. The other was that I worked hard to fulfill the needs of an expanding customer base because I enjoyed helping people, hustling for what they need (also known as gopher) and enjoyed the feeling of knowing that people appreciated my efforts.

However, from the start and throughout my career, I would end up doing work outside the scope of what my managers knew I was doing. I found that there was not a lot of effort on the part of most of my managers to really define what they wanted me to do. I would see a problem, or need, within the context of what our department was responsible for, such as supplies management or account administration, and I would develop what I thought was the best way of satisfying the need or solving the problem. This would all usually fall within the deliverables of what my Information Services department was responsible for so there was generally no problem with me operating in my “lone wolf” mode. In effect, I work for my customers not my managers.

As I worked within this hierarchical structure I would grow to be suspicious about it being necessary to even have a manager because I was working on what I thought was important, most often without the input of a supervisor or manager. However, my autocratic approach did cause issues for me because of factors such as ‘scope creep’. The way I would work on things of which my managers were not aware, resulted in my neglecting some important milestones when my workload was too heavy for me to complete on my own. This dynamic between hierarchical management structures and my approach to work will be explored in much further detail in this paper.

My first job when I completed high school was at another neighborhood company called West Chemical. My experience with work there was like my previous job. I took on more responsibility as I quickly learned my assigned tasks. I moved from file clerk to order desk attendant. In an example of how quickly I learned new tasks I remember one time where I had to back up the shipping manager while he went on summer vacation. The job responsibility was weighing and sizing freight and determining how much would fit on trucks and then deciding which truck vendor would take a load to certain geographic locations. This meant the truck had to be loaded first with the stock that would travel furthest and come off last. I remember my manager telling me I picked this up right away and the fellow who went on vacation still struggled with this.

I think I had a good experience with hierarchy in this job. With the increasing responsibilities of my position I received a slight raise in pay. I was assigned new duties, and they decided to hire high school students to do some of my file clerk duties. This made me their de facto supervisor. That was a good feeling knowing that I could progress in a work situation – and all only within a year.

However, the company began to struggle financially and started taking steps towards bankruptcy. The student workers had to be let go and a lot of the filing started to back up. I was very involved with order desk duties and could only get to some of the filing completed infrequently. This job experience became a common trope for the rest of my career: I would take some steps to increase my responsibilities, receive nominal promotions, and even start to have supervisor responsibility for others, but the machinations of the economy would result in my losing a job and result in me starting at entry level again.

In my next career move I took a job with the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard as an entry level apprentice welder. Work at the Navy Yard hardly bears mention in this context of this paper because it was civilian work for the Department of Defense – an extremely hierarchical entity. This was when Ronald Regan implemented a ramp up of the Aircraft Carrier force and Philly ended up with a lot of the work. The hierarchy of the Navy Yard operations was modelled after the military and was well established and intractable. Most of the people I worked with were assigned the trade of welder apprentice. It did not matter what your intelligence or interests were.

It was decided way up above in the management hierarchy that they needed x number of welders. They would simply put a bunch of people in the welder apprenticeship training and see who survived and who did not. After about 16 months of getting burned, pulling gas lines down three football field lengths of ship hull, and sitting below the ship in drydock doing overhead welding, with molten metal dripping back on me, as sand blasters blew away at the inside of oil tanks above me, I decided I had enough. This work was not for me. There was no climbing the hierarchical ladder in this position. I was in the dry dock, below the ship, hardly even on the first rung of the ladder. I asked dad if I could quit the Navy Yard and go to community college which he agreed to – my dad was the best boss I ever had. I remember quitting this job by calling in to the out sick call line and informing whoever that I quit, and I was never going back again.

After two years at Philadelphia Community College I graduated with honors from the Interdisciplinary Honors Program where I learned so much about sociology, history, art, and philosophy. From an academic standpoint this was a great move because I got an

Associate degree and all those credits were later accepted into Penn's LSP program and after I got a Bachelor degree in English from Penn, I ultimately ended up pursuing the Master's in Organizational Dynamics.

Instead of going directly to a full four-year college program after completing Community College, I returned to the workforce to work at Mellon Bank. I started my Information Technology career with an entry level position in computer output operations. The work at Mellon was tough because I was responsible for 24/7 computer output management and worked long days on a rotating night and day shift. From a hierarchical standpoint Mellon was more of the same. I had a supervisor, who had a manger, and so on up to the bank president. After more than four years in the shift work position, I received a promotion which included the opportunity to move to steady day work in a mainframe operation support position.

But again, after only a few months in this position the bank started running in to some financial struggles. I was a victim of the infamous 1980's "reduction in force" phenomenon. I found it suspicious and humiliating that "reduction-in-force" resulted in me losing my job and I was laid-off after 4 years and 11 months of service, just one month short of retirement vesting. Once again, as I start to climb the career "ladder", the forces of hierarchical decision making from above come to knock me down.

By hierarchical decisions from above I mean the work situations I experienced at the Navy Yard and Mellon Bank. At one the government decides to throw a ton of money at some aging military commodity where the staffing for this is just a numbers game and not based on anything about who the person is, and what their interests are. The other is at a finance business, like Mellon, where people higher on the hierarchy

pyramid decide that they just need to fire a certain number of people to maintain certain profit margins. It is all frustrating, and I will show that there are better ways to collaborate with the worker to show that a career is a partnership, and that the vagaries of economics and bureaucracy can be managed better for all.

The myth of the “reduction in force” phenomena is that employers are only terminating you because of economic forces beyond their control. But as I have experienced in my career there is a kind of double-speak scenario at work here. This “reduction in force” terminology is in place more to garner sympathy for the tough decisions the employer had to make. There is an element that me, the employee, is only being “let go” because of these tough economic decisions and not through any fault of my own. Ultimately though, I am not “let go” or “laid off” – I am fired! These are some of the propaganda tools used by hierarchical management structures that keep the power balance tilted in favor of the elite few.

When I lost my job at the bank, I was a young father with and 8-month-old son. My wife and my son were dependent on me for health insurance. I was able to use an expensive Cobra health plan but that was just a temporary solution. The reality for most people is that they are exclusively dependent on employer provided health care and I had to find a new full-time job quickly.

In a desperate move to be employed again I took a job at Sears Philadelphia Headquarters on Roosevelt Boulevard managing computer output again. This was another step back in my career path as I had moved out of this duty to a more administrative role at the bank; well temporarily anyway. Sears had a strictly regimented hierarchy structure, it seemed very similar to what I had experienced at the Navy Yard.

The department had work area leads and directors above them. I remember my only direct contact with the higher-level management was when I was reprimanded for being late. They threatened that I would be fired if I continued to be late, so I started to make better time after that. Always in the back of my mind was the fear that I had to keep this job so I could ensure my family would be covered for living expenses and the critically important health care. My time at Sears came to an end quickly as the corporate leadership decided to shut down many of the regional offices around the country. Again, I had a little time to find a new job, but I saw a great opportunity for a company whose fortunes were changing in the other direction and I aggressively pursued another entry level position.

My next job was another one that was in my neighborhood. The Silo Corporation was an electronics and appliance retailer headquartered in Southwest Philadelphia. This was a good position for me with my young family because it was right in near my home, about a ten-minute commute. However, this was once again a shift-work job. I was hired with a group of people that became employees of Silo as we took over from contractors from IT vendor EDS (owned by H. Ross Perot). This was an exciting opportunity because the Silo management decided to build a whole new IT department to take the place of the functions EDS was doing for them. This included computer operations, help desk support for stores and programming. It also included another implementation of traditional hierarchy with me working around the clock in support of store operations, under a supervisor, who had a director, and so on. Aside from my responsibilities for shift coverage for satellite communications to our stores across the country, I continued to develop my maverick and self-defined ways.

One of the programmers came up with a process to image store Point-of-Sale systems on an IBM computer called System/36. My supervisor had him show me how to image the computers and before long I was preparing all machines to be shipped across the US. I worked in the back area of the warehouse for hours on end with little direction and still covered my shift work. Other duties I picked up were installing terminals across the block long complex and I became very astute at troubleshooting and designing installations of computers in a daisy-chain format. Once again, all self-directed with little input from management.

As before, the only time the higher management interacted with me was to reprimand me. I forget completely why but the same story. If I did not correct some things I would be fired. It is ironic that I never had a sense of any decisions this level of hierarchy made, never had any direct communication unless it was negative!

Although I had excellent technical career progress at Silo, there was never any progress through the ranks of management hierarchy. I was working here in the early 1990's as desktop computer technology began to emerge. The managers did notice that I was a self-starter and gave me an opportunity to support Windows PC and Novell LAN server technologies. Work that I continue to do to this day.

As all things proceeded in the tumultuous business climate of the late 20th century, after I worked there for five years the Silo company came under tough financial times and was sold off to a British company. The warehouse in my neighborhood was slated to be shut down within a few months so I started to look for other work.

With the local company going out of business and me on my way to losing another job I jumped at the first opportunity that came my way. I accepted a position at a

company called Lennox in Princeton, NJ. A 55-mile round trip each day. I did OK in this position as a staff technician working for a supervisor. The supervisor was subordinate to new manager who started shortly after me. The director and vice president above them were basically horrible people. You could feel the nastiness in the way they conducted themselves after only a brief encounter.

To me Lennox represented the worst aspects of hierarchical management. In the brief time I was there I saw times where top management blasted the supervisor and they would turn right around and give me grief. The company was owned by Jack Daniel's from Tennessee, which sounds like it could be great, but there was no clear management direction between the two sides of the company. Confusion at the top and throughout the culture only resulted in everyone being unhappy.

This whole organization was dysfunctional, it shows that even though a company has a strict hierarchical structure which should provide balance and control, they can often be a vehicle for toxic culture through the ranks. It was crazy for me to drive all that distance only to feel horrible. As I would drive back down I-95 each day I looked at all the buildings and figured there had to be some other opportunity for me in Philadelphia. After less than 6 months I did some searching and was able to find a good job with Red Cross back in Center City Philadelphia.

Red Cross is a quasi-government organization with a highly structured management hierarchy. This work arrangement was interesting because I was hired as an in-house IT support staff for a group of IT contractors that worked for Deloitte & Touche. Deloitte is a very formal contracting company and the staff carried themselves very professionally. This was interesting to me because I had never been directly exposed to

this type of professional culture. I learned a lot about the functions of Information Technology projects from programming deadlines to quality assurance and testing.

Once again though, I was not directly involved in the programming and computer infrastructure they were planning to implement; I just had to keep the desktop computers running. I fell back on the autocratic practices of working for my customers with little supervision. As all things in my career though, the managers of Red Cross Headquarters in Washington DC were vacillating about the plans – and price tag - that Deloitte had proposed for a new computer system so the whole Philadelphia operation was slated to be shut down. Since I was an in-house employee, I did not have to worry about losing my job but I decided I would try to find a new opportunity; something that would, for once, not be threatened by the changing whims of Washington or the economy.

Working for the University of Penn

I knew some friends that worked for the University of Pennsylvania (Penn). They all enjoyed working there and I thought this might be a good career path for me. I began working for the health system (UPHS) in April 1995. Once again, my technical career path was good here. When I interviewed, I was selected to work on server technology because I had experience with this already. This opportunity was another situation of the management deciding to replace IT contractors with in-house staff and most of the other people that were hired were assigned to Help Desk and “break-fix” positions. I was happy that my prior experience resulted in me getting the opportunity to work on server versus desktop, just a step above entry level.

As usual the work found its way over to me, and before long I was doing all kinds of projects directly for my customers without the knowledge of my supervisors. This came to a critical point where my workload was so great that a few of the customers got upset and I was called in to the director’s office to be reprimanded. I felt this was unfair because the managers were basically absentee as far as my workload was concerned. A typical process in a management hierarchy is they should have the project work go through their level first and then allocate it to me. As usual our communication practices were poor, and they did not check to see what I was doing on a daily, weekly or even monthly basis; I did not have status meetings nor was I asked to provide status reports for my activities.

I feel these types of processes are important but should be directed from above if there is a hierarchy in place. Throughout my career I have experienced management

hierarchy structures which were inadequate in managing the total work required by a group, such as IT support, and were only invoked when a performance issue arose.

I thought I would be free of the threat of impending job interruptions by working at Penn but again, after only a few short years, there was decisions from above that the IT Support work for UPHS was going to be outsourced to a contracting company. This would mean me losing my Penn tuition benefits and being terminated to start a new job with just another random IT contractor company. I saw how a big-name player like Deloitte was handled by Red Cross, I did not want to take my chances with this change. I came to work with Penn and that was who I wanted to work for me!

In an ironic twist, the supervisor and director who had reprimanded me offered me an opportunity to go to work directly for a department at the hospital (HUP). I think they saw it as a path for me to move away from their being my managers and I saw it as a chance to continue as an employee of Penn.

The administrator who I went to work for at HUP really knew how to operate in a hierarchy. He was the medical and administrative director of the Nutrition Support department, a medical practice that he founded at HUP. He also became the Vice-President in charge of Perioperative Services at HUP, another department he built from the ground up. Even though he was a director with many managers and staff below him I worked directly with him because I was one of the only IT staff members within his administrative organization. I think I thrived at this job because I saw him as my main customer, and my usual autocratic practices were dedicated to what he needed. The group of other people I performed services for were direct reports to him and were a small enough and manageable cohort that he generally knew the work I was always

performing. There was still a strict hierarchy between nurse managers, clinicians and administrators, but in my IT role I was able to work directly with the executive level here, so I enjoyed not having the typical difficulties of hierarchical management that caused me so much problems in the past. I enjoyed this position.

Although this job was going well, I decided to try to find a job away from UPHS and with the University of Penn directly. The tuition benefit for my dependents was better at Penn and since my kids would be starting college soon, that was an important benefit for me. I interviewed for an opportunity at the Vice-Provost for University Life (VPUL) office that included supervisor responsibility for a small staff. Many people from UPHS advised this may not be the best move for me, but I thought it would be good to finally move up a “rung of the ladder” to a supervisory position.

Most organizations in academia are of a standard, traditional hierarchical structure and this was too. The important part is that the director kind of just bumped up to her position because of technical proficiency and not because she had good management skills. As I worked in this department, I realized that she only hired me to create another level of management so the Help Desk staff would not report to her directly. I got the job instead of one of the long-time staff members who all the other team members wanted to see get the job. My step up the “rung of the ladder” was into a firestorm of dysfunctional interpersonal politics.

I plodded through this position for a year and ½ or so. I would reprimand the staff one day as suggested by the director and then be called out for being too tough on them another. One staff member was particularly troublesome because she was acting out and manipulating many situations long before I came on board. At one point they

had us both go to a mediation and my only response was that the director was the one who should be in this mediation, not me. I remember this work environment being so stressful that I broke down crying on my way to work one day. I had to call in sick that day, but it IS NOT acceptable under any circumstances that work-life difficulties go so far as to cause a person to have a nervous breakdown.

After many different troublesome situations with my performance, and my inability to handle the ill-behaved people in this dysfunctional work environment, I was asked to resign my position. This is the situation where I feel organizational practices at the University of Penn are at fault. There should have been better opportunities for me to go to work elsewhere rather than being fired from Penn; there should have been better oversight and management of a toxic work environment like this.

I was still the sole provider for my family and even though my kids were closer to college age, I separated with Penn because I was devastated both mentally and physically. I thought I would be able to ensure against losing a job due to the whims of the economy or Washington, but never did I think I would be in a situation like I was at VPUL. It was a relief to leave this horrible work environment.

I briefly took another job at a Financial Services firm, but I checked Penn's job postings and found a new position that would allow me to return to Penn and regain (bridge) some of the benefits I lost. I took a job at Penn Dental Medicine (PDM) at a salary much lower than I was making before, but it was good to regain the benefits and feel that I could restart my work journey and pick up where I left off at Penn.

Penn Dental has a standard department hierarchy with me working for a supervisor and a director in turn. I was hired in a position to support a student computer

lab but this job, like so many others for me, became much more. My supervisor was out on sick leave when I was hired, and when he returned, I realized he was a pompous type, but his game was just doing as little work as possible. A variety of desktop support and account administration jobs would come to our office aside from the computer lab support and I started to incorporate all that work into my daily schedule. Because I was getting a lot of work done the director started coming directly to me with requests for service. We had a lot of walk in traffic and I quickly started handling all facets of those requests for service, as well as purchasing services and some web development.

My supervisor complained that the director was coming right to me with work and he interjected that he should control the work I was doing. This slowed everything down. I know the director preferred bringing work to me directly, but the supervisor became a cog in the process just by virtue of his position in the hierarchical order. His general approach was to assert his hierarchical authority over me and make it so I could not work directly for the director without his input in the chain of command. These are some of the negative aspects of hierarchy that a different system could address.

Both bosses eventually moved on to other jobs and a young guy with an MS Degree was hired as director. Unfortunately, I preferred the old director, and it led to me and the new director having frustrations over how to complete the work. I had an issue over one project with him as soon as he started, and I think this first mistake on my part kept me from ever being successful under his leadership.

On another point he had a very formal approach to work and was constantly aware of what he was working on and where his career path was heading. He was very bright with doing a lot of programming and technical solutions so he oversold a lot of

solutions that our group could do. He was always more concerned with showing the next great techie thing than worrying about having the correct staff level and the necessary procedures to support the solutions he came up with. I worked for a couple years under this manager and I had a lot of initiative in learning and completing many of the services we provided. I found that I was often doing the work of other departments such as classroom technology, and I was trying my best to keep up in a group that was always short-staffed.

Another young go-getter came on board as the Director of Fiscal Operations (FisOps) to whom my director answered. These people were basically much younger than me and aggressively moving through their career paths. With my disdain for authority, this became an issue especially with regards to my being older than them. The FisOps director's approach to staff performance management permeated through all the departments. My managers started to harass me with performance issues – which occurred mainly because there was not enough staff to handle the workload. I could tell these ideas were coming from this new director and I was ultimately reprimanded for performance issues again. I made it clear during my meeting that the real issue was there was not enough staff to handle the workload and the HR director backed my position. I was still placed in performance management, but they knew they were just as much at fault as I was.

My original director at PDM had promoted me to a grade “C” position, and all along, this was an issue for the managers that came in after him. The responsibilities for this pay grade was to do project work, taking a whole service, such as new phone systems or email conversion for the entire Dental School, from conception to completion over the

course of many months work; work which I performed with little supervision. That I had this job grade continued to be an issue with the people at the director level. For me though, regardless of hierarchy or what the managers were trying to do with staff, I stayed the course and worked through my performance management and kept my salary grade.

Eventually the young Fiscal Operations Director and IT Director were eventually replaced; they moved on to other positions whether they wanted to or not and a new IT Director was hired. Another young person with an MS and aggressive procedures to storming their way through the management hierarchy was hired to the position. I was working independently on the email conversion project when she felt that I was not “project manager enough” and took steps to finally remove my pay grade. Once again, back down a step of “the ladder”.

This situation was particularly disappointing because by being grade “C” is was moving up in my career path, doing work above day to day, break-fix type stuff. In the late 20th century an effort to provide career growth for people who did not want to manage others was implemented; this was a career track for technical versus management-oriented personnel. Considering my experience as a supervisor at VPUL this was a perfect opportunity for me to find career success without having personnel duties, but it was taken away.

Another aspect of this demotion is that my immediate supervisor was grade “C” and the director felt that from a hierarchical standpoint two people of the same grade could not be in a superior/subordinate position. I fell these are some of the machinations of hierarchy at its most blatant where the option to have a thriving technical career path

are not an option when strict adherence to hierarchical processes of subordination are enforced.

The fits and starts of my career path are not all that uncommon. There are few people such as the young directors that I had who are driven to do well in making progress through the hierarchical management path, and even for them the possibilities are limited. There are only so many jobs available for the “bosses” of this world. There also do not seem to be well-defined career and workload processes for all the services that different work groups need to deliver. Often the process is more about the individual as they try to scale the hierarchical ladder than it is for the processes that benefit everyone in the work team. I will explore possible better ways of managing work in the next sections.

Education and Extra-Curricular Activity

My career path within hierarchical management systems has not been stellar. I have always had a disdain for working under a supervisor because I felt that there needed to be something more and different. With my working in such an autocratic manner throughout my career I felt there had to be systems where we could all be our own bosses. Although I did not make much career progress at Penn, I did get a chance to make great progress in my academic life by taking advantage of Penn's tuition benefit.

After working at Penn for a few years I joined the College of General Studies (CGS) now known as Liberal and Professional Studies (LPS). I was happy that the college accepted most of my credits from my Associate degree and I started taking a course every other semester or so. I had a keen interest in humanities curriculum, as a departure from my work-life based on technology and business disciplines, and eventually got a bachelor's degree in English.

Shortly after getting my BA I joined the LPS Organizational Dynamics program (MSOD). The MSOD provided me with many alternate perspectives about hierarchical organizations and a person's role within them. I learned about alternate management and employee coaching methods which were not part of the standard hierarchical work-life dynamic that I experienced in my career. The rest of this paper will go into greater detail about this.

As I took my final courses in the MSOD program in 2016 I came across a group of technology aficionados called the Progressive Coders Network (ProgCode) who formed a network of programmers and activists that quickly developed technology to support the grass-roots initiatives of Bernie Sander's presidential bid. I followed my

son's lead in following this group and I found I was able to connect with many like-minded individuals who were driven to operate and deliver their projects in collaborative, non-hierarchical ways. I was excited to find there was a world where work could be accomplished without mandates that came from only a few select leaders at the top tiers of an organization. This experience was critical to the ideas I developed for this paper and are expanded upon in the next sections.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW: THE POTENTIAL FOR NON-HIEARICHAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

A Brief History of Hierarchical Management Systems

Some background first: The hierarchical management organization is the dominant organization form used by groups in society and businesses – historically and to this current day. This form of management and social structure has resulted in many positive outcomes. It cannot be argued that for people to work in a hierarchical model, working under the direction of supervisors and business owners, has resulted in a spread of prosperity that resulted in the emergence of the ‘middle-class’ in society. Most people work for someone else, and must abide by their direction, but the same people enjoy some semblance of prosperity in being able to own a home and provide for education and health care for their family. They may even be able to indulge an interest in a hobby and enjoy entertainment opportunities and the occasional vacation.

There are reasons hierarchical organizations are the dominant form. Adherence to this type of structure may be implicit, like hierarchy in pack animals where stronger individuals dominate the weaker ones. This seems to show in human society because a lot of a person’s reality is determined by where and what type of family they were born into and what access they had to better education and job opportunity. These opportunities are based on connections within their family and social group, and

accumulation of power and wealth over generations that truly differentiate who is ‘weak’ and who is ‘strong’ in society.

However, adherence to this “it is what it is” hierarchical structure provides a measure of security for all. By having well established business structures people can “go to work” and realize a measure of prosperity in a way that diminishes individual risk. The agents operating in higher levels of the hierarchy establish businesses and keep them running. These tasks are not left to each of us in a way where we may not be able to address the breadth of tasks required to “fend for ourselves”

The benefits of hierarchical structures are well known and enjoyed by most of us in society, but the heavy burden of working exclusively under the direction of others results in a subversion of significant human potential. The requirement of needing to go to work full time within the management structure, and in a field or industry, determined by others results in a lifetime of doing ‘work’ just to survive and not a path to fulfill an individual’s ultimate potential.

The literature I reviewed for this section showed a historical development of this phenomenon of groups and individuals organizing in hierarchical manners. I was glad to find references that confirmed some of my strong suspicions about this. The teachings of Scientific Management and the work conducted by Peter Drucker confirmed how the infrastructure of hierarchical management developed and strengthened in the 19th and 20th centuries. Subsequently I found articles that highlighted problems I had felt were ingrained in hierarchical management that result in missed opportunity for many people such as myself.

My participation in the Organizational Dynamics program at Penn has included a lot of concepts about optimum management. I was privileged to have many lessons, and exposure to books and articles, which have helped me form these concepts and ideas about the potential for non-hierarchical organization management and structure. However, the ideas I will explore about non-hierarchical systems must be analyzed and contrasted against what I have learned – and experienced – within hierarchical management structures.

During fall of 2010 I took the DYNM669: *Leadership in Organizations* course with James Larkin. This course provided a breadth of knowledge about common circumstances that people found themselves in that resulted in their discovering leadership qualities as they navigated work and life circumstances. In addition to class discussions we were assigned many books and novels to read such as *She's Not There-A Life in Two Genders* by Jennifer Finney Boylan and *Martha Gelhorn: A Life* by Caroline Moorehead. This provided me with a way of comparing my life experience to those of others. As my own curiosity and potential continued to develop through my participation in MSOD, I conducted some alternate study by reading *Guns, Germs and Steel* by Jared Diamond. The book is densely packed with fascinating explanations of how human culture progressed from “hunter-gather” societies to establishing farming and herding communities in the Fertile Crescent area of the Middle East (Diamond, 1997).

The switch from hunter-gatherer lifestyles to farming and herding has continued to evolve to be the structure of modern societies we have today. The one concept that I found most fascinating in this book was the idea of “kleptocracy”. I had heard of democracy and the description of a personal behavior known as kleptomania, which is an

uncontrollable urge to steal, but I had never heard the terms combined to describe, “a government by those who seek chiefly status and personal gain at the expense of the governed” (Merriam-Webster, 2019).

The following passage succinctly sums up the phenomena of kleptocracy and the maintenance – and agreement to – hierarchical status quo (Diamond, 1997)

By now, it should be obvious that chiefdoms introduced the dilemma fundamental to all centrally governed, non-egalitarian societies. At best, they do good by providing expensive services impossible to contract for on an individual basis. At worst, they function unabashedly as kleptocracies, transferring net wealth from commoners to upper classes. These noble and selfish functions are inextricably linked, although some governments emphasize much more of one function than the other. The difference between a kleptocrat and a wise statesman, between a robber baron and a public benefactor, is merely one of degree: a matter of just how large a percentage of the tribute extracted from producers is retained by the elite, and how much the commoners like the public uses to which the redistributed tribute is put (p. 176).

Although a significant zeal that I have for my topic of non-hierarchical management is informed by the evidence that hierarchical management results in wealth inequality, which has developed through time, I need to be sure to focus my writing on management hierarchies and not the economic realities. As per Diamond above, the important thing about the power and control of the elite that has developed, possibly even

prior to hunter-gatherer social organizations, are the hierarchical organizations that were put in place to keep a strict social order.

The concept that emerged in my thinking was about how organizations are configured with regards to how certain groups, or classes in society, have relatively absolute power. Was this done willingly by the governed or did the rulers coerce and force this type of structure on the populace so they could maintain wealth and supreme control over the majority in this type of organizational structure? From my perspective these “kleptocratic” methodologies of how people can act within these hierarchies is ingrained in society. To this day “business as usual” proceeds with an unbalanced distribution of wealth, CEO based management of most business activity, and political structures that only represent the interests of the kleptocrats that can influence legislature with money and power. These in turn result in the hierarchical management structures proceeding from board members to CEO to Directors to Managers to the ground level employee; these are the structures that I have experienced in my work history.

Another source of ideas I had about all of this is a book my son lent me called *Throwing Rocks at the Google Bus*. Although I will return to this book as I write later about non-hierarchical management structures, I was struck by an idea author Douglass Rushkoff proposed. He explained that as a middle-class marketing and trading structure was emerging in the middle ages the ruling class of the elites and kings implemented rules that they were the only ones who could mint and distribute money in the form of coinage (Rushkoff, 2016).

He states, “the Monarchs of the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance outlawed local currencies and replaced them with what amounted to coin of the realm” (Rushkoff,

p.129). He goes on to explain that this control over currency, and in turn, control over the emerging middle-class market, consolidated power in the hands of the ruling class. This prevented a trend that may have resulted in a less hierarchical society and instead resulted in a society where, “with absolute control over coin, monarchs could exert absolute control over their economies” (Rushkoff, p. 129). This helped me realize the formation of hierarchical structure that developed in the earliest of social gatherings, such as those in the Fertile Crescent, were further strengthened in favor of the wealthy and ruling classes in the middle ages.

Rushkoff goes on to explain the emergence of modern finance and, most importantly, the emergence of the modern corporation (Rushkoff, 2016)

When monarchs and their favored merchants founded the first corporations, the idea that they would be obligated to grow didn't look like such a problem. They had their nation's governments and armies on their side – usually as direct investors in their projects. For the Dutch West India Company to grow was as simple as sending a few warships to a new region of the world, taking the land and enslaving its people. If this sounds a bit like the borrowing advantages enjoyed today by companies like Walmart and Amazon, that's because it's essentially the same money system in operation, favoring the same players (p. 131).

A vibrant middle-class economy was emerging, and the king and his cohorts took steps to control the methods that people were using to trade with each other. The

merchants were establishing processes for trade and transfer that did not involve the machinations of a 3rd party. The process of taking control of money, through insisting that all transactions had to be conducted using the ‘coin of the realm’, allowed for the rulers to manage all commerce, ensure that they would realize an economic benefit from all transactions, and implemented the structure required to garner taxes (that is be paid) on the activity of the middle and laboring classes.

Again, for me this is not about the economics but a matter of laying the groundwork for the emergence of modern, hierarchical, management practices. By strengthening these ‘kleptocratic’ methodologies rulers were at the top of the social and business hierarchy. The governors of the corporations that were invented at this time could develop all laws and contracts that would, again, control the activities of individuals down the line from regional magistrate to local business owner to their employees – command and control.

This “command and control” organizational configuration is explained in a journal article analyzing formal and informal hierarchy by Diefenbach & Sillence (2011). They reference the teachings of renowned sociologist Max Weber in defining the explicit structure of hierarchical organizations where, “hierarchy can be understood as vertical formal integration of official positions within one explicit organizational structure whereby each position or office is under control and supervision of a higher one”. This is certainly the only form of organization I have experienced in most of my career. I think they succinctly capture my experience within a formal hierarchical system, “as an official system of unequal person-independent roles and positions which are linked via lines of top-down command-and-control” (Diefenbach and Sillence, p. 1517).

Another lesson in MSOD that stuck with me regarding my topic was a guest lecture presentation by Alan Barstow in the DYNM501: *Perspectives on Organizational Dynamics* course. One of the topics Alan explained was the practice of Scientific Management that was developed by Frederick Winslow Taylor. He went on to explain how the principles developed by Taylor, and practiced by many others, led to a phenomenon of craftsman migrating from being able to run their businesses under their own independent management processes to being incorporated in collective structures which fundamentally changed the practices of their crafts, and resulted in the emergence of the modern manufacturing and management processes.

Taylor highlights the necessity of hierarchical management where, “to work according to scientific laws, the management must take over and perform much of the work which is now left to the men” (Taylor, p. 10). He explains the management hierarchy that I have experienced throughout my career where, “almost every act of the workman should be preceded by one or more preparatory acts of the management which enable him to do his work better” (Taylor, p. 10).

While Taylor goes on to explain that this type of organization, where a manager decides and defines everything, should be an amicable relationship between management and employee, or laborer, my experience shows this to not be the case. Some of these scientific and modern management measures were limited due to push back by organized labor. In *Prophets of Order*, a book which explains some of the historical fallout of “Taylorism”, the problem is described as, “widespread application of scientific management would have undermined the power of skilled workers, so they fought it” (Stabile, p. 44).

I think the reality of a management organization based on these types of hierarchical structures can be problematic and there is an internal “push-back” response from an individual employee, such as myself, that consistently questions the decisions of management and intrinsically feels the inadequacies of working under a manager. I have found work within a hierarchical management structure to be adversarial because of the nature of the power dynamic that exists - a power dynamic in favor of the manager versus the employee (me).

However, there are many components in the Taylor essay which have contributed to modern organization and decision theory that will prove to be necessary if “non-hierarchical” systems can be established as I will investigate later.

Peter Drucker was one of the foremost ‘philosophers’ writing on the requirements of how to improve approaches to business management. “Businessmen know Peter Drucker as a writer of uncommon verve, practicality, and incisiveness who deals with management matters but who occasionally shifts to the role of business in the larger social system” (Bonaparte, Flaherty, p. 6). This blending of an analysis of management practices with the realities of living within social structures is an important component of my project.

Throughout my career experience I have struggled with the rules and power dynamics enacted within traditional hierarchical management systems, versus my own power to operate as a free-agent who can determine the best course for solving the problem at hand in the best interests of my customers. I learned a lot about social sciences in my academic career and valued my cognition around the parameters associated with working under hierarchical management structures, but as indicated in

my career history, there has been a consistent dissonance that emerged. I wonder if it is possible to develop a scientific and systemic method for a new model of work relationships that can result in better harmony between business needs and the core values of the individual.

In one of his influential works *Concept of the Corporation* Drucker explores the business management processes on one of the most important companies in history, General Motors. The dynamics between the worker and executive management are a constant struggle for the individual. As I have seen in my career, and as Drucker and others have explored, one of the key components to success within the hierarchical model is training and job promotion. Drucker explains in his philosophical prose that at General Motors (Drucker, 1946)

For the great majority of automobile workers, the only meaning of the job is in the paycheck, not in anything connected with the work or the product. Work appears as something unnatural, a disagreeable, meaningless and stultifying condition of getting the paycheck, devoid of dignity as well as of importance... No wonder this results in an unhappy and discontented worker – because a paycheck is not enough to base one's respect on (p. 179).

He demonstrates that in the auto industry, as can be in most or many jobs, the worker does not feel they are a part of something meaningful – something developed from the desires of their personal agency.

Drucker also explains the difficulties the average worker has in finding advancement in their work-life where, “there is an ever-growing tendency among plant managers to depend on outside sources rather than on the men in the plant for their supply of foreman and other junior executives” (Drucker, p.178). I am very familiar with these issues of job advancement as I have seen all the supervisors that I have had throughout my career come “from the outside”. I have seen this in most of the other departments in organizations that I worked in for as well. It is significant that I have worked for more than 30 years, in multiple industries, for multiple companies and the de facto promotion standard is to hire someone “from the outside” into the supervisory roles.

Drucker does go on to explain that General Motors did develop training programs to assist rank and file workers in their development where, “the first and most obvious step to give the worker equal opportunities is to offer him a training that will put him on an equal competitive level with people who have had a chance to go to engineering school or to college” (Drucker, 180). This could be a significant game changer for a person’s movement through any management structure, but it is not the norm.

Peter Cappelli, who is a Management Professor at Wharton, has written extensively on problems associated with hierarchical management and worker advancement and training. He explores the historical development of companies, such as those that first developed as the auto industry in the US. His analysis succinctly, and ironically, combines the phenomena of how craft industries evolved prior to Taylorism - where the young apprentice would go off to start his own business rather than spending life working under his teacher - with the problem of trying to develop people so they could advance their career in the company where they worked. He states, “With so little

hierarchy and the fact that founders typically ran everything ... the only real advancement opportunity for anyone who was not a family member of the owners was to leave and start their own business” (Cappelli, 2010). He explains how Walter Chrysler and Charles Nash went on to start their own companies.

This shows a management and learning process that was squashed by Scientific Management as craftsmen were incorporated into the factory: a process of learning a trade and then moving on to be the ‘boss’ of your own enterprise. As most work experience today consists of working in large organizations for someone else this is not an option available to most of us.

Cappelli’s journal article highlights a facet of hierarchical reality that is exactly what I have experienced (Cappelli, 2010)

There was no way to assess the capabilities of the managers and predict who could handle an executive role, a problem with a remarkable contemporary feel. It was an easy choice to find someone who had already done the job elsewhere. Second, there was no clear model on how to develop managers who might have some but not all of the requirements for these executive jobs (p. 510).

It is interesting to note that Cappelli states this hiring phenomenon has “a remarkable contemporary feel” as it is, in fact, the status quo that I have experienced. In this article he explains that companies like General Electric developed training programs, such as those mentioned above by Drucker, but goes on to explain how the

recession and change in business practices in the 1980's resulted in a reduction of these training programs (Cappelli, 2010)

The most important change in practices had to do with use of lateral or experienced hiring to fill key vacancies especially in the management ranks.

Businesses that had to respond quickly to changing markets typically needed new competencies to do so and hiring experts and seasoned managers from outside was the easiest way to do that (p. 540).

This is certainly more in line with the movements that I have experienced in my career. I think there was an almost mythical idea that a person would go to work for a company and experience a high level of training which led to many promotions, but the reality from the late 1970's and beyond, the timeframe of my career, is that this myth has been destroyed. Again, this is a vagary I feel has led to my dissatisfaction with hierarchical management structures.

Another important aspect of my work experience is how hierarchical organizational structures result in a dissonance which led to me having emotional breakdowns more than once. Randy Hodson explored the concept of 'dignity in the workplace' where, "dignity is contingent not only on protecting oneself from abuse, but also on having personal space for one's individual identity". He goes on to explain, "worker strategies are autonomous behavioral agendas that arise in response to the demands of the workplace" (Hodson, p. 722). This certainly highlights the dissonance I

experienced as I sat by the side of the road, in emotional turmoil, as I feared that I would lose the job I needed to support my family.

Quite often the trouble I was having at work were the result of extraneous forces such as not enough staffing to complete the work satisfactorily, or interpersonal problems between the director and the staff before I was even hired. Hodson shows, “direct supervision, in sharp contrast to a craft organization of production, is associated with the lowest levels of job satisfaction, pride and effort” (p. 729). Hodson’s article goes on to explain issues with job dis-satisfaction in many realms but I often felt the performance management tactics taken by managers, who were higher than me on the hierarchy, were unjust – and meted out through simple exercise of hierarchical placement rather than a fair and thorough diagnosis of organizational issues.

Although this is a brief description of hierarchical management systems that have existed for eons and are in place across the breadth of the planet, I think these citations highlight some of the important issues that exist in these systems and in my career personally. I think operating within these types of systems can result in a lack of power for the individual for being comprehensively responsible for the results of their own agency. There are many decisions made above and without them that they have little opportunity to influence. Working within these structures can quite often result in conducting a day to day work-life, and even an entire career, that is only in pursuit of a pay-check; work that does not include a full incorporation of their personal desires which results in a meaningful participation in an enterprise. Because of fundamental changes in how businesses need to acquire talent and compete in a quickly changing technological business landscape, as opposed to craftsmanship occupations or early factory work, there

is very limited opportunity for workers to experience appropriate training and job advancement.

Finally, is the matter of workplace dignity that may be unobtainable in hierarchical management systems. With the conflict between worker and management resulting in management styles, which do not include the full input of how a worker prefers work requirements to be addressed, to resistance of management decisions and processes by those same workers. It is yet to be seen if these issues can be corrected in non-hierarchical systems.

The Promise and Problems of Non-Hierarchical Management

Just as hierarchical management systems are used the world over and through time as the default mode for organizing business and social activity, non-hierarchical systems are not common at all. Groups of people never generally lean towards organizing in a way that does not include leaders who possess a higher level of power than the group members. As I mentioned above, it is almost as if organizing with an individual, or small groups of elites, who take the role of ‘boss’ or leader of an enterprise, is implicit behavior for groups. History has generally shown that group members will not cooperate towards common goals, or will simply devolve into chaos, if there was not a strong structure influenced by hierarchical power that everyone must follow.

Many groups have strived to implement non-hierarchical forms of management over time. They tried to develop social and business structures that included group cooperation and group decision making, without the presence of someone in the leadership or boss role typically found in a hierarchical configuration. Most often this type of configuration sees limited success before the processes required to complete critical activities break down so that nothing is accomplished. Another phenomenon is that the tenets of hierarchical organization and certain power dynamics emerge so that there is, in fact, a hierarchy after time. Groups start with the concept of non-hierarchy as an ideal but informally devolve into groups of influence and power.

In corporate structures there were movements towards philosophies such as “manage up” or flattened organization structures which I will explore. However, a lot

these initiatives encounter operational issues and companies soon return to working in traditional hierarchical modes.

I have found that even as organizations stay constantly aware of these issues and are determined not to back-slide into hierarchical configurations, there are always some functions such as budgeting and hiring that are ultimately managed by only a few elites within any organization.

The literature I reviewed for this section was very enlightening. Since most of the writings about non-hierarchical systems are more recent and not as historical as those pertaining to hierarchy, I had to find articles, organization charter documents and even webinar resources to gather detail about this part of the topic. The overriding theme of the articles was to contrast the emerging tenets of non-hierarchical organizing against those of well-established hierarchical structures. Through this analysis most authors were able to highlight the issues with non-hierarchical organizing and that greatly informed my conclusions about this topic.

My career experience, as it has always been within hierarchical management systems, resulted in my having my career potential and realities formed and regulated by the tenets of this management structure. Since I have little experience and participation in non-hierarchical systems my review here will involve a more hypothetical analysis of these types of systems by me. I will approach what I know about non-hierarchical organizations from the standpoint of the potential they present for me, such as what could have happened in my career if non-hierarchical management processes were the more prevalent form of organizing structure in business.

One of the points I listed above was the difficulty of my receiving adequate training in my career within a hierarchical organization structure. Although I used their words in the previous section to show that there was inadequate training for the rank and file employee Taylor and Drucker wrote extensively of options for training the work force. The basis of management taking over the functions of craft workers and subjecting them to scientific methodology was for the research and development levels of management to codify and catalogue all learnings where, “under scientific management exact scientific knowledge and methods are everywhere sooner or later” (Taylor, p.54).

On one hand it is significant organizational diagnosis to note that I received very little training and instruction on how I should do my work. I mostly approached all problems as I saw fit and developed the skills by my own means. This was so many years after Taylor’s work changed the world; it is surprising I consistently saw almost no training across many years and many jobs that I had in my career.

I even went so far as exercising a danger that Taylor warned about when, “even if the workmen were to develop laws where before existed only rule-of-thumb knowledge, his personal interest would lead him almost inevitably to keep his discoveries secret, so that he could, by means of special knowledge, personally do more work than other men and so obtain higher wages” (Taylor, p.53). Or in my case I developed solutions on my own, I was developing organizational knowledge that allowed for me to protect my discoveries and increased my value as an employee who would not get fired.

In contrast to my work experience, the promise of an ideal non-hierarchical system includes some of the scientific management tenets of Taylorism where processes would exist to gather all knowledge obtained by workers, and capture that in a

continuously improving catalog of *functional management* practices. At the same time, my contribution to this catalog would be rewarded in such a way that I realize there is more benefit to my contributing to the global knowledge base than there was for me to hoard my knowledge.

Drucker, in the section about equalizing opportunities explains what is required to train a workforce where, “we could not possibly have found lasting solutions in the very short time – not much more than 50 years - since we first became aware that such a problem exists”. His essential premise is “that this country first realized the central importance of the problem of the worker’s citizenship in industrial society” (Drucker, p. 180). He is writing about training the workforce within traditional hierarchical structures but the key to my project is that, even more, this training and sense of citizenship must be foremost if non-hierarchy-based management system is to thrive.

One of the central themes I have discovered in non-hierarchical organizations I have researched is the premise of readily available training material and knowledge sharing. The world today has evolved to taking advantages of open-source coding platforms such as Linux and GitHub. Historically companies have hoarded their knowledge, just as I did with what I learned, in order to protect their intellectual property. Rushkoff cited the error of their ways because, “ the false assumption is that people are incapable of recognizing the value of their shared resources and then organizing to protect them – and in doing so, create great value for everyone involved” (Rushkoff, p. 216). So, companies would not share processes, just as workers would not share and teach things they knew. This was the operating standard in hierarchically structured corporations but Rushkoff indicates it can be otherwise.

The evolution from hierarchal to non-hierarchical management structures is becoming a newly implicit way of doing things because of the emergence of industry from craft to industrial to the information age. Computing technologies have allowed for a more level playing field where many self-motivated individuals can learn technologies by reviewing other's knowledge posted on the web in tools like Wikipedia and GitHub. The new standard is that code and processes are "open-source" and are available so that anyone can use and contribute to them. They can then develop and test coding, or systems design, and share the completed code and tests of the hypotheses to the same resources so all can build on each other's efforts. Even hierarchically entrenched companies like Microsoft and IBM have finally had to embrace "open-source" methodologies in the 21st century.

Rushkoff cites political scientist Elinor Ostrom on how this phenomenon emerged, and revised a sense of "commons" that was once prevalent for farming in medieval England, where, "she concluded that a commons must have a revolving set of rules about access and usage and that it must have a way of punishing transgressions" (Rushkoff, 216). This is surely a methodology that with the proper rule book can allow for an organization to operate without the normal hierarchical tiers of management. Many software developers throughout the world only know work where they are the arbiters of their daily planned activities and performance management is only meted out if they are derelict in how they handle themselves within the commons. I think I would have realized a much different career if parameters such as these were in place.

Practices of business productivity within the frameworks of a "commons" topology is an organization phenomenon bought on by dramatic changes in technology

which have allowed for most everyone to have access to high speed internet and computing devices. Traditionally computing was provided within the corporate, or commercial environment, and its usage was bound by the hierarchical rules of those environments. That technology has so changed to where power is in the hands of the individual, so too will management change to reflect the importance of the individual over the organizational hierarchy.

This philosophy of commons methodology is a very promising approach to non-hierarchical organization structures as discussed in a journal article in 2018 by Bauwens and Pantazis. They highlight the contribution of the individuals operating in peer-to-peer (P2P) and networked organizational structures as, “a relational dynamic of human interaction, (which) seems to invoke ideally a model in which humans act or have the potential to act as equals. In practice, this means that they may organize themselves in decentralized and non-hierarchical networks, with the aim of communicating, collaborating, creating and exchanging value”. This is a configuration is known as ‘commons-based peer production’ (CBPP) practiced by, “some notable examples of which are Wikipedia, GNU/Linux and WordPress” (Bauwens & Pantazis, p. 303). These companies, where the mission of providing products and solutions that are for the benefit of people versus profits, thrive best within this non-hierarchical configuration. This appears to be a groundswell of organizing in a manner far different than that of traditional hierarchy.

They go on to highlight the activities of companies such as Enspiral, which was formed by activists of the Occupy movement in Wellington, New Zealand. A few of the

tenets of the Enspiral working mode highlight the spirit of work in a non-hierarchical organization structure (Bauwens and Pantazis, 2018):

- 1) manage and retain an operative equilibrium under a set of shared values and a passion for positive social impact
- 2) members of the community are free to choose when to join or leave and how to contribute to the network
- 3) use of technology tools, such as Loomio, to help self-organized communities make decisions without centralized coordination
- 4) all assets held by Enspiral Foundation are managed collectively by its members.

I know of many of these types of efforts to develop non-hierarchical organizations where decisions and all work activity are governed by the consensus of the group, particularly by taking advantage of emerging data and communication technologies. These organizations show great promise, but it is yet to be seen if methods like these can be applied to companies that operate under traditional hierarchical modes such as Fortune 500 companies, academic institutions, and the like.

However, in a journal article published in 2011, Vallee and Moreno-Galbis seemed to recognize the changes that were occurring in business organizations because of the emergence of certain technologies. To me, this seems like a disruptive trend that could lead to changes in traditional hierarchies. Their article fits my thesis because they discuss the proper time for an organization to switch from “Tayloristic” modes of operation to more holistic types. They propose that, “over recent decades, the massive adoption of information and communication technologies (ICT), has been associated with

a restructuring process in the internal workplace organization of firms as well as with a labor force skill-upgrading process” (Vallee & Moreno-Galbis, p.238).

Vallee and Moreno-Galbis propose that workplace organization has traditionally been based on a ‘Tayloristic’ model where work is completed by the specialization of workers by task which is ‘intratask learning’. A new ‘holistic’ model is emerging with a greater level of new technologies and multitasking which is ‘intertask’ learning. (Vallee, Moreno-Galbis, 2011). They propose that this dynamic has, “facilitated the decentralization of decision making and has enabled employees to become more involved in each other’s work through the introduction of job rotation and teamwork” (Vallee & Moreno-Galbis, p. 239). I would seem that technology is driving this change, and the type of worker skilled for this change, and the type of management structure required for ‘holistic’ work.

Now this is certainly pertinent to my job experience! I have worked with technology my entire career which is during the time period Vallee and Moreno-Galbis discuss. I have seen some indication of the ‘holistic’ trends they observe through limited cross training and our teams work with knowledgebase and project management tools like Atlassian Confluence. Most recently, communication tools by Slack Technology, which allow for a constant chatter of work questions and problem solutions, have become the norm in many work settings. On one hand it is ‘holistic’ to be able to check with co-workers on solutions for a problem you are working on – which is good. On the other hand, I have seen these tools quickly become surveillance tools which the team uses voluntarily to report on their whereabouts – which is not always good.

The trends analysis provided by Vallee and Moreno-Galbis seem to indicate that work within traditional hierarchies could possibly evolve to a model employed by groups that consciously strive for non-hierarchical structures such as Enspiral, but the tenets of hierarchical management remain. In my job we have our round table meetings that allow for us to voice our ideas or concerns. We have our knowledge bases which can be used to leverage the knowledge of others so we can quickly learn new skills. We attempt to give voice and practice to collaboration methodologies, but they are here one day and fade the next.

The essence of the work always comes down to being directed by and having performance managed by the managers, and not being involved in certain higher-level processes such as planning, budgeting, and hiring. Unless there is a profound necessity for a re-working of traditional hierarchical processes, where manager and director roles are redefined, in favor of truly collaborative and non-hierarchical schemes across the board, the non-holistic (Tayloristic) way of doing work will persist.

In a caveat to how I am arguing against hierarchical management, an article about *Redesigning Work: Teams* proposes structures where having managers is a positive component of work group success. Sanner and Bunderson state that hierarchy is vital to the functioning of all social groups from children on the playground to executives in the board room. They state, “while the idea of hierarchies may go against democratic instincts and beliefs, they can and do play useful roles” (Sanner & Bunderson, p. 49). They portray the role of manager as an arbiter of group control in idealistic terms, “teams with a clear chain of command (clarity and agreement about who defers to whom) were less likely to get bogged down in conflicts” (Sanner & Bunderson, p. 51).

This “is the way that it is” that I am most familiar with but it does not address personal issues such as fear of speaking out or being seen and not heard with regard to power dynamics that I have struggled with throughout my career. When a superior is present, they are in charge, and most everyone else in the room will defer to their perspective. I had a long career and have been in many meetings and I have not ever experienced a manager who encouraged free flowing ideas and simply facilitated dialogue to keep a collaboration on track versus expounded on their own objectives.

The Sanner & Bunderson article had good ideas about the requirement for something that creates boundaries to drive a group toward solutions, facilitates the convergence of ideas and structures processes to keep a group on track towards agreed upon goals. They again indicate that this must be a superior in a hierarchical configuration where, “clarity about who is in charge and how each member contributes can help everyone on a team feel like they could — and should — engage in the learning process” (Sanner & Bunderson, p. 50) and I, again, argue that this is exactly the kind of dynamic that causes a person to withhold their ideas. I do think this structure is critical in a group dynamic, but I think it can be established and agreed upon without the presence of hierarchical management.

Although I am a strong proponent of a new non-hierarchical vanguard some of the problems of this type of organizational structure need to be recognized. As listed above, maybe it is not possible to have groups of ‘equals’ work together toward shared objectives without the presence of dominant individuals to keep things on track. If true, it shows that non-hierarchical systems are impossible. Another problem of these systems is that no matter how hard the members try these systems are hard to start and maintain. As

has been indicated throughout this paper, hierarchical systems are innate in the animal kingdom and in social groupings. It seems groups cannot exist unless someone, or certain elites, are dominant over most of the group members. Some studies show that even if people strive to form non-hierarchical structures informal hierarchy entities emerge.

In their paper on formal and informal hierarchy Diefenbach and Sillence explain multiple organization structures from traditional bureaucratic types, that feature strong hierarchical configurations and dominance of work activities by management teams, to newly emerging 'postmodern' types of organizing which I have experienced in my career. They reference that, "with the introduction of these new concepts employees and lower management are simply given more operational tasks and merely the *feeling* of being empowered". They go on to highlight the problematic configuration that is a theme of this paper because the "new forms lack, for example, collective ownership, shared control over major decisions and equality" (Diefenbach and Sillence, p. 1526).

In a return to the surveillance of the Slack tool, or the emergence of informal hierarchy no matter how hard the members try to avoid it, they explain, "employees are expected to monitor, control, regulate and manage each other's contributions and performances, even behavior and attitudes". This results in a hierarchical rather than collegial spirit where, "teams, projects, or similar, so-called 'collaborative' work arrangements and environments, often mean *more* pressure and more 'gentle' ways of *informal* coercive control and punishment for the individual than most external methods" (Diefenbach and Sillence, p. 1527). Some of the 'gentle' ways Diefenbach and Sillence highlight are that people with strong personalities who employ coercive rhetoric can eventually impose informal hierarchy practices on any attempts to the contrary,

Some of the promise of non-hierarchical organizations are explored in this article as well. They explain that the “network” organization consists of members who work, “to establish non-hierarchical and open forms of collaboration built on trust and mutual understanding” (Diefenbach and Sillence, p. 1528). They reference the work of Colin Hales to provide a precise description of the configuration companies use as they attempt to establish non-hierarchical organizations (Hales, 2002):

The internal network organization is conceived as a loose federation of informally constituted, self-managing, often temporary, work units or teams within which there is a fluid division of labour and which are coordinated through an internal market, rather than rules, and horizontal negotiation and collaboration, rather than hierarchy Instead of a hierarchy of vertical reporting relationships there is a ‘soft network’ ... of informal lateral communications, information sharing, and temporary collaboration based on reciprocity and trust (p. 54).

Even if tactics evolve that cause an organization to crumble back into informal hierarchical configuration, Hales’ prosaic description is certainly the ideal to which collaborative can strive.

In the next section I will explore a few organizations that have tried to operate in more egalitarian and non-hierarchical ways. However, I would first like to make a brief mention of some operating procedures that are required for a more networked type of organization to succeed.

An important concept of operating with a non-hierarchical organization structure is the departure from dominant-subordinate forms such as corporate autocracies, where

an elite group decides and implements the action plan, to a newly emergent form of governance known as holacracy. Wikipedia describes this as a method of decentralized management and organizational governance, in which authority and decision-making are distributed throughout a holarchy of self-organizing teams rather than being vested in a management hierarchy (Wikipedia, 2020). This organization model, of course, follows a more 'holistic' than Tayloristic format.

The management philosophy was developed by Brian Robertson as an extension of the procedures he used in managing his own company. I recently participated in a webinar conducted by Robertson and found many of the tenets of this practice pertinent to my analysis of non-hierarchical organization structures. The following approximates the content Robertson presented in the webinar I attended recently (Robertson, HolacracyOne, 2019):

The first tenet was that rather than having *static job descriptions*, which would limit the action a person could take within the organization, there should be *dynamic roles*. He explained that a person could take dramatic initiative within their role and do what they felt was necessary to get the job done. They would not need permission from their supervisor to reach out to other members and teams regarding issues such as assigning tasks that need to be completed or other issues they were working to expedite the delivery of their part of a project.

The idea is to work without the *delegated authority* found within the typical bureaucracy. However, all actions are regulated by a shared governance tool using *constitutional authority*, which is *one rule set for everyone*. Strict adherence to the constitutional guidelines, and a shared set of rules, by everyone from entry level team

member to Roberts, who is the company founder, is what makes this non-hierarchical configuration work.

He explained that the defined roles and the constitution would go through processes of constant modification and improvement and this was the key to how Holarctic systems worked. Traditional hierarchical organizations would need to go through disruptive and troubling *large-scale reorgs* that could result in mass layoffs of personnel when they need to adjust their processes in order to correct organizational problems. In holacracy *tension driven iteration* is the component that is consistently invoked in order to keep an organization operating at its optimum. If anyone feels that there are problems with executing a function in their role, or in how functions are being conducted within another role – even that of the founder - they should add that issue to the *tactical* weekly meeting agenda. Through discussions about these *tensions* in the meeting iterative changes can be made and a set of *next actions* that can correct issues or at least get them out in to open can be set by all and agreed to.

However, like all good deeds, there are negatives to the practices of holacracy. The functioning department level organizing component in this configuration are known as *circles*. Primarily the practices of circles according the Wiki article are that, “circles are organized hierarchically, and each circle is assigned a clear purpose and accountabilities by its broader circle. However, each circle has the authority to self-organize internally to best achieve its goals”. However, “decisions are funneled down from circle to circle in a clear hierarchy, with each subsequent circle knowing less about the big picture than the one above” (Wikipedia, 2020). Also, individuals operating in roles are free to act and innovate but are restricted in spending assets of the organization

(i.e. money or intellectual property). These limitations will come into play in the conclusions of my thesis.

While there are many companies that strive for non-hierarchical governance which use elements of holacracy they may not be explicitly following Robertson's constitution. Although, as with any organization there are problems this holacracy movement is an accurate foundation for some of the types of processes and collaborations companies must enact in order to thrive.

The solutions adopted and provided by a company like HolacracyOne are an example of the expanding role of technology tools in helping organizations, both hierarchical and non-hierarchical, in building cultures that allow the opportunity for all members to contribute and have their voices heard. This is certainly a step in the right direction for a company to being more open about how they determine what is important and it is a way to flatten organization structures and gain the perspectives of all employees.

The tension between the workforce and management is an ongoing predicament. A worker may want to operate autonomously, and the goal of management is to control everything that occurs in an organization. Some of the solutions listed above point to an option of operating in a sort of hybrid hierarchical mode where workers are engaged in the decision making of an organization and feel they have control over their work environment. A lot of these ideas seem to be recent developments, but some management theory has proposed solutions on these issues for some time now.

Gerald Susman writes about this in his highly technical analysis in the book *Autonomy at Work*. He proposes a formalization of the design around the role of

workgroup contributions in the organizational structures. That is the development and operation of groups composed of rank and file employees and methods to incorporate their perspective to make significant contributions to how an organization should operate (Susman, 1976). He cites that through these processes, “labor is challenging managements prerogative to be the sole judge of how capital and its proceeds are distributed” (Susman, p. 71) and in turn how all aspects of an organization are performed.

In these processes he labels the input of the workgroups as “an act of appreciation”. I see that this terminology is effective in that the contributions could be deemed as helpful for the overall process of the organization. He contrasts this against decision making which has “goal states and possible transformations to achieve them” and highlights that this type of input from workgroups could lead to “noticing new dimensions of reality and assigning value to them” (Susman, p.73). This seems like it could be an exciting practice which would empower rank and file employees and allow them to feel they have some measure of control. This is basically the whole premise of my theme for this paper.

Susman proceeds to develop his ideas about workgroup contribution in a section called “Decisions in Autonomous Work Groups”. I have to note that my approach to work and many things in life has been to operate in an autonomous manner so it is all the better if the process of employee contribution can still maintain some of that autonomy. He highlights the main perspective and tension of my project where I wanted to have more control over my approach to work and not be subject to decisions that only flow in one direction: from the executive and management level and down to the daily operations staff.

He provides categories for decisions provided by workgroups such as those that are intrinsic to the production process and those that provide freedom from technological and organizational constraints of group members experience (Susman, 1976). A third category is not mutually exclusive to the other two, and those decisions are not “because group members can make them better than higher organizational units can” but because “they increase the group’s capacity for self-governance” (Susman, p. 121). This self-governance provides a training ground which flows over to all areas of life where the individual can develop the “interpersonal skills required for good citizenship or organizational advancement” (Susman, p. 122). I feel that Susman is very accurate in assessing the outcomes of adopting these types of processes.

Now Susman is writing in 1976, about the time I started working, and I have not necessarily seen much of these processes adopted in the companies I worked for. [I imagine if I have, I would not even be writing this paper]. However, I have seen a recent emergence of communication tools which are now allowing for more constant forms of communication between the rank and file staff and management. One tool that has been very important is the Slack app. This app provides for all users to be able to provide quick text notifications about anything they are working on or thinking about. We first used this application in ProgCode and it allowed for a channel to be created for each project. Different project members would list what they were doing and any issues they were having that would require different skills that others in the team may possess.

The functional ease of using Slack, and the option of how a work-team could quickly get perspective and solutions to problems, made it so this tool was quickly adopted by formal organizations such as PDM and Penn in general. In my job I found

that it was very helpful to use Slack to better resolve issues. It was almost a paradigm change to how for most of my career I would have to struggle through issues on my own without a lot of assistance or training. The Slack platform also provided an easy forum to use for all users to contribute things that could make the workday more enjoyable such as posting a joke meme or make birthday wishes. Although this is not exclusively non-hierarchical the platform did allow for a sense that all team members – supervisors and employees – were on the same page and aligned in their thinking.

I explored another productivity tool called Waggl that could provide for an emergence of non-hierarchical methods, or at least allow for the employee to feel they can be heard. The product is a technology app that is configured to be used through three phases: pulse, in sights review and check-in. The initial phase is ‘pulse’ where a set of questions are proposed and voted on by all staff. The ‘insights review’ phase provides further interaction between management and staff where “these sessions become springboards for collaborative action”. The ‘check-in’ phase “provides an opportunity to align further on the next steps and learn the impact of any actions to date” (Waggl, 2020).

This process comprises the function of gaining consensus, acting, and conducting the all-important ‘feedback-loop’ that is elevated in most management improvement initiatives. The white paper provided by Waggl highlights a critical issue which I have experienced in my career and “provides every individual the opportunity to speak up, and addresses the sense of fear and futility that breeds a culture of silence” (Waggl, 2020).

I had the opportunity to speak with a customer representative at Waggl and was able to get an enhanced perspective on how the product is used in allowing employees to have their voices heard. The customer lead, Jennifer, mentioned the benefits of

organizations which have adopted the Waggl tool. She mentioned that it democratizes feed back where anyone can be heard. Submissions could be anonymous, and it removed the barriers between the front line and senior leaders. It instilled a new way of being for an organization.

I mentioned that I have seen these initiatives “come and go” and situations where consultants like Deloitte & Touche would come in and all the work they performed usually did not lead to long term results. She said the difference is that it was a matter of “engagement versus enabler”. This is where Waggl, and their company support, is more than just a performance study but could be used to become to an authentic change to an organization culture that can “turn the process of employee feedback on its head”.

It made sense that there was a difference in the Waggl approach, similar to the rules of engagement used by HolacracyOne. The process of stages used in the Waggl method would be implemented two to three times a year and become second nature and “build muscle with core employee engagement, people metrics pertaining to culture and experience, vision and execution”. She explained that in companies that have adopted Waggl this would result in “real time transparency” where employees would see the results of their input “in real time”. This certainly sounds like a very promising option to instilling real cultural change in an organization.

I find the Waggl product to be interesting because I have experienced many times where the organization attempts to get feedback from all employees on ‘tensions’ that they encounter in their daily work but like most things, these efforts come in waves and are all the rage for a time, but they then fade in to the background. It is unfortunate that

a tool like Waggl could not find the same high level of adoption that Slack did. It would make all the difference in the culture of an organization. However, I may introduce the idea of Waggl to my new HR director. We shall see.

To conclude my literature review and begin my analysis I would like to investigate a few companies and how they configure their management structures to see if they can realize the promise of moving away from status-quo hierarchical management methods to the more egalitarian and collaborative processes of non-hierarchical structures. At this time I think it is most important for me to reflect back on my career path and imagine if there could have been a different outcome if I had the opportunity to work in a different manner than I had experienced.

One of the cooperatives that have garnered a lot of coverage is the Mondragon organization. Mondragon is a Spanish organization started in 1955 which provides a network of companies that share administrative resources and a culture based on cooperation. In the article Roche et al. explain within Mondragon “broad employee ownership and governance of the coops underlies Mondragon’s culture” and “the combined size and large scope of its over-all activities enable it to offer a credible alternative to a traditional hierarchical business model, which today is increasingly showing its limits” (Roche, et al., p. 155). These are key components to realizing alternate management structures than those I have experienced directly.

Mondragon operates with a comprehensive network structure that allows for participants to act from the power of their ownership and take the steps necessary to propose constant change where, “decisions involving a proposal for change can be initiated at any level of the organization. It is a top-down/bottom-up process with

emphasis on bottom-up” (Roche, et al., p. 157). This is a mode of operation that could be implemented in many organizations and would result in a feeling of ownership and collaboration by all stakeholders but, again, not something with which I am familiar.

The cooperative culture of Mondragon provides for a proactive approach to career growth and the development of leadership opportunities. With an emphasis on providing opportunity and developing talent from within their organization (Roche, et al., 2018),

Mondragon offers education programs for members who want to move to leadership positions. Candidates for these programs are usually recommended by the cooperatives. High potential candidates typically have good technical and people skills. Candidates can climb the ladder also by representing their colleagues. In addition to training programs and on-the-job opportunities, Mondragon offers the opportunity to rotate within and among coops (p. 160).

In addition, the Mondragon culture allows for a person to make career missteps as they attempt to grow their leadership skills and not have it end up in their termination if they fail. Mike Zabala, Human Resources Director at Mondragon, explains, “if a professional is a good person with potential, but his performance was below expectation because the environment was not a good match, then we will give him the opportunity to move to another coop in an area that is more suitable to his skills” (Roche, et al., p. 160).

It is unfortunate that philosophies such as this are few and far between in the business world when a focus on employee participation and job advancement, such as

this culture at Mondragon, could only result in a positive situation for the organization and the employee. I will explain some of my experience counter to this dynamic shortly.

Another well regarded company that strives to operate under non-hierarchical management practices is Valve Corporation of Bellevue, WA. They are a video game software company that – possibly through necessity – adopted their management practices to suit the non-hierarchical personalities of software coders, engineers and ‘gamers’ attracted to working in this industry.

Teppo Felin explores the culture at Valve where he states it is a kind of, “*polyarchy* where individuals can pursue initiatives at their own discretions ***without fear of managerial intervention***” [emphasis mine] (Felin, p. 10). Felin highlights a “rule of three” philosophy that Valve endorses where no project can be started by just one person, on their own. All projects must be agreed to by at least three people who will participate on the project. He shows that, “the need for social interaction can lead to improvements and changes in the nature of the initial idea and project itself as well as the consideration of adjacent opportunities beyond the purview of any one individual” (Felin, p. 10). This shows the evolving role of collaboration in non-hierarchical management systems.

Again, as there was in the Mondragon culture, the Valve organization has a high tolerance for employee missteps where, “mistakes are inevitable (and even encouraged) as Valve, after all, operates in a dynamic and uncertain technology environment where experimentation and trial-and-error are part of the process of innovation” (Felin, p. 11). Felin applies glowing terms to the organization at Valve which has, “created a seemingly dynamic, self-organizing ecosystem where strategies and opportunities emerge endogenously as individuals imagine, interact, and self-select to create projects and joint

value” (Felin, p. 11). However, he does deem the efforts as ‘seemingly dynamic’ which is an indication that no matter how the organization is structured there are caveats, informal hierarchy, and intractable power dynamics which cannot easily – if ever- be reconfigured to work in a more democratic and collaborative style.

CHAPTER 4

METHODS – PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION AND SURVEY

Career Self-analysis

I have learned a lot from conducting the Literature Review above. As I mentioned in the career detail which I provided in the first chapter, I have not had a stellar career with regards to operating within a hierarchical system. As I think through what I learned about non-hierarchical systems and the companies that attempt to practice them, I find it is important for me to compare some of my experiences against what a non-hierarchical system would have delivered if they were more of a standard of operation. Most importantly, this is a great opportunity to explore problems which I encountered in my career and will hopefully provide a better way for me to understand them.

One circumstance that is critical to analyze is my work with the Vice-Provost for University Life (VPUL) department at Penn. I worked for the Penn Health System for 7 years, but I saw an opportunity for me to switch to working directly for the University. In addition to moving to Penn this position involved an opportunity for me to take on supervisor responsibilities. I figured this would finally be a chance for me to take a step up on the career ladder.

I did not know I was stepping into an extremely dysfunctional work environment. The director was hiring me because she could not manage the Help Desk staff as they would “act out” and conspire to resist her authority. In addition, one of the other candidates for this job was a current staff member and part of the same group that were

causing issues and the other staffers wanted her to be the new supervisor. I cannot blame them for resenting that the job was given to “an outsider”.

Naivety is a life-long character flaw with me and I assumed I would be moving to a position where the staff would be happy to have me as their supervisor – I am an easy going guy, I like to teach new skills. But this job move was not a learning opportunity for me to develop new skills, this job move was a mistake. Even within the purview of normal hierarchical operations the director needed someone with extensive supervisory experience, and she should not have hired me.

I struggled to do my best in this position, but I had many issues. I would get direction for me to be decisive and hard on the staff at one time and then the next I would hear that they were complaining that I was too hard and that I should lighten up. The “acting up” continued in ways where the one person would directly antagonize me; possibly in a way where they probably should have just been written up and fired already, but they seemed to get away with it. I wonder if they possibly had connections somewhere else in the organization that allowed them to be so bold and not fear retribution.

There were many different incidents in which my authority was questioned. I never really had any authority at all with the conflicting direction from my boss and the continued acting out from the staff. I was not able to improve or even operate this department; I was just another cog in the dysfunctional processes.

The department made limited attempts to correct the issues by having me and the difficult staff member participate in a conflict resolution moderation session. I remember thinking that I was not the one who should be trying to resolve my issues with this staff

member, their issues were with the director, not me. But the director would strategically avoid taking responsibility for their role in all this dysfunction! After about 18 months of my struggling in this position, it finally came to the classic hierarchical step of attempting to correct issues by conducting another re-organization and I was asked to resign from this position and Penn altogether.

Some of my learnings about non-hierarchical organizations could be used to respond to this incident and if they had been in place, they could have improved the situation. One is the way a Holarctic organization would have allowed for me to cite the extreme tension and difficulty I was confronted with in this position. However, I will proceed with the next examples, as they were all during my Penn career, and then provide a comprehensive analysis and diagnosis of my career experience at Penn as a whole.

I was out of work for a few weeks on severance pay after I resigned from Penn, but that ran out and I took a job at a finance company but I was keen on getting a chance to go back to work for Penn. I saw an opportunity to work for Penn Dental Medicine (PDM). Even though this job was at a significantly less salary than I had previously, I accepted. This is the tumultuous reality that I navigated as an employee at will, I wanted to regain the tuition benefit option and again acquire the better health benefits for my family.

I worked at PDM under one director who I really enjoyed working for. The closer I work with people who are higher on the hierarchical pyramid without a supervisor or manager in between was always a better outcome for me. The director would come to me with project work that needed to be completed quickly and efficiently. My immediate supervisor was a lazy type who just spent time in his office on the internet most of the

day. He complained that the director was assigning work directly to me, so he had himself inserted as the middleman in the work delegation and that made the process less efficient.

The director I liked was fired by a very eccentric and erratic Dean we had at a time (the Dean did not last long at PDM either). A new young director was brought onboard. This director was very talented with programming and IT projects, but I held some passive-aggressiveness about how my old director was fired. In one of my first encounters with the new guy I had an issue with new course requirements that were due. In the past the previous director had taken the first steps of contacting student registration for the detail and I would configure the online course application called BlackBoard. Since I did not know about this part of the process, I told the new guy I had no clue about it and that his predecessor took care of it. This interaction got me off to a bad start with the new director.

The director and I worked together at PDM for many years and I never got past the misstep in that first encounter with him. Other staff members who were more compliant got a chance to make career advancement from Help Desk to System Administrator but I was just stuck at Tier-1 Help Desk, answering the phones and doing clerical work – even though I had skills to do much more than that.

Again, I think my circumstances in this position were affected by the individual will and whim of the director higher on the management hierarchy and if there were a different way to operate a business than relying on the power and decisions of a particular person, I would have had a more positive outcome. One option would be that the work process would be better documented, and I may have known more about the other steps

that needed to be taken. Another is the tension we had would be escalated in a more transparent and programmatic way versus the private interaction between a superior and subordinate. The third is that my misstep would not have become the directors bias towards me and resulted in my not being able to advance in the group.

My career at Penn is a long and dynamic journey. There are many instances of my work-life that I used as case studies for different papers in the Organizational Dynamics program. Another aspect that I think is a good fit here is my job interview history. I have been interviewed for more than 30 jobs at Penn and I am never picked as the candidate. I think one factor is that I may come across as too enthusiastic and that they may sense my intrinsic disdain for hierarchy and realize that I would be hard to manage.

In one course at Penn we took the Hermann Brain Diagnostic to determine what our personality qualities were. The diagnostic assigned different colors to various behaviors: green was for having a more regimented personality with a high degree of following processes, blue was for executive function with associated skills such as planning and delegation, red was for social intelligence and yellow was for creative processes. My readings for yellow were off the chart, almost double any of the others. With this I concluded that in a hierarchical organization structure no one hires “yellow”.

If there were more processes in place which elevated the hiring process, so it had to adhere to the structure of a non-hierarchical organization methodology, such as those at Mondragon or Valve, I would have fared much better. In the non-hierarchical structure, job opportunities and hiring processes are more transparent and not just left to the individuals - usually someone at a supervisor level to whom you would be

subordinate. I feel I always came across in the interviews as someone who was free-thinking and unorthodox when people are usually looking for someone to follow orders. With all this in mind, it makes sense that the only jobs for which I was hired was to join a dysfunctional work team and another that was with a significant pay cut, and while the immediate supervisor was on medical leave.

This brings me to the big picture. It is unfortunate that an academic organization such as the University of Penn does not operate in a non-hierarchical way more often. While we have schools like Wharton where tomes of writings are published regarding management practices, we see a concept like Holacracy spawned by a little IT company in Exton, PA. I think there is a tremendous missed opportunity that could be realized if Penn were to embrace the tenets of non-hierarchical management structures such as those used at Mondragon.

One component of the Mondragon system is the consolidation of shared administration, where functions such as finance, human resources and information technology are handled by a core entity instead of primarily in each sub-company, or school or division in Penn's case. I know there are centralized functions at Penn like finance but there is a disconnect between those same entities at the school level.

I have worked for years where multiple technical solutions for something like email were implemented by the various schools. One group chooses a Unix solution, another Microsoft Exchange and still others use consumer level cloud solutions like Gmail. With this people cannot share email addresses easily and collaborate in meetings. Penn finally moved to a consolidated email recently, but things would be much different

and efficient if the processes of a consolidated administration were in place. Instead of working for PDM or VPUL I would work for the central IT function (jobs for which I had interviewed for multiple times), there would be no IT jobs at each division or school. If all IT staff worked for a central core service, there would be no need for each school to grapple with their need for email and develop solutions on their own in a vacuum.

The IT function would have practitioners that specialized in the affairs of a particular school or division according to the practices at Valve. The practitioners who had the best knowledge of a specialty location, like Dental Medicine, would have a faster path to provide feedback to the core service, which could then incorporate feedback from all specialties and build solutions that could benefit the entire organization rather than just the particular school or division.

Implementing the non-hierarchical practices such as those used by Valve would allow the employee to have mobility where they could easily move to a different specialty, or even to a job requiring different skills if it suited them. I could only imagine the efficiencies gained, the frustrations avoided, and the successful career paths realized if the hierarchical University of Penn (including the Health System) implemented non-hierarchical organization methodologies and processes.

I propose the scenario where instead of my taking the job at VPUL the existing staff would have had to opportunity to express their tension within the guidelines of Holarctic governance. The processes of that group would have been managed by quality improvement instead of passive-aggressive resistance. When I took the job at VPUL I was not really looking for a supervisor role, I was just looking to move from the Health System to the school because of different benefits. If both entities managed within the

same central core services model, like those at Mondragon, or in the flexible project configuration at Valve, I most likely would never have stepped foot in VPUL and I never would have encountered the psychological torment and crushing fear that I was subjected to while in that position. I would probably have not gone to PDM either.

Instead I would have the wherewithal to have comprehensive knowledge of all functions in the organization, I would be able to move from a specialty at the Heath System to the school and back again. If I did go to VPUL or PDM I could have initiated an opportunity to cite tensions that were occurring and have them processed in a way that did not result in my termination (VPUL) or my being subjected to years of bias (PDM). Most importantly, even if I did take a step to move in to a supervisor opportunity I would have been able to determine that the step was a mistake, that I was not the right fit for that opportunity, and I would have been able to just move to an opportunity that was a better fit versus my being terminated.

The Progressive Coders Network

The topic of this paper has been informed by a predilection I have had for non-hierarchical management for years. It is interesting to see how my son has picked up on my rhetoric and thinking on this topic and how he has contributed to some of the ideas I have. He deemed that the process of operating an organization by in a more systemic way using non-hierarchical methodologies be called *functional management systems*. A few years back my son, and I and a few others, had dialogued through the Slack application on proposals for improving how business operations could be modified and enhanced in this regard and I think some of that has come through in this paper.

On one hand, some of these ideas about non-hierarchical systems are personal ideas I have about how management practices can be changed. On the other these are ideas that I realize are shared by many people and there may be a time when these ideas will become stronger and begin to disrupt hierarchical practices. Social media technology such as Slack, Face Book and Reddit have provided a channel for ideas about this topic to be shared quickly and efficiently.

One significant social media group that I participated with is the Progressive Coders Network (ProgCode). The group formed out of a network of technology practitioners that quickly organized to develop technology tools such as Get Out the Vote, car share applications and protest marketing in support of the Bernie Sanders presidential bid in 2016. The mission of the group is to support these technology initiatives and to ultimately, “get money out of politics”. Another important operating

edict is for the members too work in as collaborative and non-hierarchical ways as possible.

My son was a founding member of this group and was involved in recruiting and marketing to get more and more people involved. Their literature highlights the tenants on non-hierarchical management where the ideal organization is (Breslin, 2017)

A semi-autonomous operation driven by a highly integrated system managing end-to-end, continually improving functional processes, minimizing business inefficiencies, including waste, redundancy, poor training, inconsistent documentation, and tool inflexibility. Beginning with an idea, work flows through the company transparently so specialized teams are assigned small and achievable work. People's individual contributions are tracked and rewarded accordingly as social capital, with mobility and autonomy encouraged as long as the team member has completed the individual function's training.

The components of governance at ProgCode are a model that can be implemented anywhere if the practitioners agree to always keep the goal of operating efficiently, with constant feedback loops, and constant improvement first and foremost in mind.

The different teams in ProgCode operate from the standpoint of proposed projects such as "Carpool-action" which develops technology tools to help people find rides to their polling places on election day. An individual may come up with an idea like this and they propose it to the general population to see if it is a feasible project. The group administrators create a Slack channel for the project. The person who had the idea will

join the channel and then petition others with more information about their project and the kind of technical skills they need. Other members will then join and work on different aspects of the programming as much or as little as they prefer. The person who came up with the idea may operate as a project leader by defining how the product can be built, and the skills they need, but they are not the ‘boss’ of anything in a hierarchical sense.

Most of the contributors in the ProgCode community are very skilled in multiple technologies and very motivated to volunteer and contribute to the projects because of their passion to see how change in government and business can be accomplished in a more equitable and collaborative way. This is achieved by, “distributing authority among as many people as possible, ensuring individuals learn a variety of skills while no single person can seize a monopoly of power” (Breslin, 2017).

I was almost euphoric when I came across this phenomenon of social organizing and technology development that the ProgCode community represented. I was still able to contribute even though my IT skills are more in the realm of desktop support, which is mostly performed in a building in person, versus the high level programming that could be performed very well in this remote collaboration environment. I joined most of the channels and participated in a group that was trying to launch an online news magazine which would provide alternate sources of news in contrast to those provided by mainstream media.

In the various channels I acted as a guide. I would recommend channels and connect programmers who were looking to contribute to projects based on the detail that I had read. There was also significant opportunity for someone who was interested in

building programming skills to join a channel and work on part of a project that would give them practice, or I would guide them to a plethora of online resources that are available for developing skills. I also assisted with onboarding and some of the administration.

My participation in the ProgCode community showed me how people could work collaboratively and achieve important results. A person could determine what they wanted to work on, and how much work they wanted to do. Frequently we found that all parties were very energized and motivated by the ideals that the different projects proposed and how that reflected the collaborative spirit, and learning opportunities of the group. It is most important to note this was all accomplished without the usual hierarchical bureaucracy which was implicit in most of our “day jobs”.

I joined the Progressive Coders network and started using the Slack application for communication around project work in 2017. The tenets of this group provided a refreshing perspective on how work could be conducted within the structure of a non-hierarchical management system.

Hierarchy Survey

With my familiarity of how some non-hierarchical organizations are managed, and how my participation in the Organizational Dynamics program has informed my ideas about ideal management structures, I decided that it may be worthwhile for me to reach out to other Dynamics students and alumnus, and a few other groups, to see if non-hierarchical organizational management philosophies are in use any other organizations. I prepared a survey and distributed it earlier this year.

One assumption I made was that even if non-hierarchical practices are used for daily operations in an organization, there are some silos of activity that are the exclusive domain of founders, executive committees, and board members. The challenge would be to see if any organizations were so open in their practices that all profits were shared equally, and all decisions were made democratically.

I will proceed in this section with each question from my survey followed by a brief explanation of some of the responses and how they reflect the theories I have explored regarding non-hierarchical management systems.

"Do you work in an organization that strives for a non-hierarchical mode of operation? Please, briefly describe your organization."

Of twenty respondents only a few reported that they work within a non-hierarchical structure. Two of these came from respondents in the ProgCode network so I already know that they strive to operate as non-hierarchical. Of the other ones there is a

rhetoric that although not fully non-hierarchical they try to execute daily operations in a non-hierarchical way. One respondent noted that, “Yes, we have titles and structure but our client service duties are very similar which create a non-hierarchical mode.” Another reported that. “Yes, at Gore we use a flat, lattice structure and hierarchy is typically Associate, leader, leader of leaders”.

To me this seems there are initiatives to develop more open work environments where employees can feel they are self-directed and working collaboratively, but their response may be a realization that still and all they are working in a hierarchical structure. One respondent was very optimistic about their work situation where, “Yes. My organization encourages its employees to network across all different sectors of the business, supports continuous learning, provides open and ongoing feedback, and the culture is open and approachable. There is an internal leadership council that delivers feedback from all levels of the organization to the CEO”.

This is a glowing review, but it still involves leaders over those that are led and a process of trusting that they will deliver the feedback as effectively as it could be if made directly. This informant is actually a GE employee so it is comforting to note that if a multi-tiered, Fortune 500 company like GE could put some vehicles in place for employees to be heard maybe there is hope for the rest of us. This respondent seemed to anticipate my other questions so there will be more on this issue of reporting structure in the next sections.

What processes are used to ensure that all members get an equal opportunity to contribute to the organization?

My respondents from ProgCode echoed that they strive for transparency and autonomous contribution from all members through technology tools such as Slack where everyone is free to make their opinions known. One particularly promising response from another contributor was, “My team leader solicits input from the whole team and values our input equally, regardless of seniority. I would say it is an informal process”. The idea that a person’s input can be valued aside from seniority or title is a very important aspect of business communication whether non-hierarchical or not.

Again the, respondent from W.L. Gore provided a nice perspective where, “We talk about work as contribution and we make commitments. We also rank and evaluate our team members against contribution to the enterprise”. These are similar processes used by ProgCode where you develop social capital by being involved. People know who did the work when they demonstrate the functionality of their deliverables within a standard platform, or process, which recognizes the contributions of all members.

Quite a few respondents cited that there were anonymous surveys that could be used for providing feedback to management. Another response showed that allowing for staff to contribute was not a directive from the top levels of management but, “informal and because there are not formal processes it is up to individual leaders to create an environment that allows for a diversity of perspectives to be heard”. Now this could be OK if you have a team leader who cares about feedback but if this activity is not a critical

component of organization operation it is just more command and control with decisions being enforced from the top.

"Are there any job responsibilities that are only managed by certain members such as founders, or those that have been with the organization a long time? Please briefly describe the situation."

One response that jumped out at me regarding this question was from a contributor who explained their organization has a typical hierarchy with senior staff that meet exclusively to make decisions that affect the entire organization. They cited a major issue where, "often times decisions that the team comes up with, such as staff wide initiatives get broken down, picked apart, or misinterpreted in this small group meeting". This reflects back on the previous question where in a hierarchical management structure there may be a tendency to appear to want feedback from all stakeholders, but when it comes time to make decisions they can be transformed to being what the senior management want, and in reality, they exclude the perspectives of the rank and file staff. This could be a worse situation than not even asking for feedback in the first place.

My interest in this question stemmed from the idea that an organization could strive for pristine non-hierarchical practices but when it came to financial and administrative functions like hiring new staff the decisions would fall back to an elite group that would control this. I even saw this as I inspected groups such as ProgCode, Valve and Enspiral. To me this was the key point that the tentacles of hierarchical management would always be expressed some way within an organization structure.

So, it was not unexpected to see that most respondents explained that this was the area of business operations where hierarchy came back in to play. I was not surprised to see responses such as, “Yes, as founder, I manage all the financial operations. Also, our most senior managers handle client invoicing”. Another response clearly states the functions where it actually may be necessary for a smaller group of personnel, with stronger decision-making power to take the reins as, “bringing on new staff, moral leadership, annual gatherings, bulk of admin processing and HR”.

Most of the responses cited the presence of hierarchical management and command and control processes for these functions and at this level of involvement by the people who founded an organization or may have most as stake in managing by using traditional hierarchical methods. However, I was very surprised to see the response from one of my ProgCode informants where, “Yes. The few core members are in charge of all budget decisions. Not all things can be part of a democratic process or we would go bankrupt”. Maybe a hybrid design of democratic and hierarchical processes are required but that would be a topic for another paper.

How is it decided on who joins the organization?

This question is a continuation of the previous one and most respondents said that there were typical HR processes in place for hiring new employees. How employees join, and the reasons why employees join an organization are balanced with the type of organization structure in place. Most for-profit businesses hire employees as needed through a normal HR hiring process and most of the non-hierarchical entities were

volunteer organizations looking to get as many people on-board as possible. A typical process for them would be, “All registrations to join are reviewed by one or more directors, who conduct a light vetting of the registrant's credentials, to ensure that they are who they claim to be and that they will act consistent with the community guidelines and mission of the organization”. The key being to act ‘consistent with community’ guidelines. These non-profit, non-hierarchical, volunteer groups are usually open to letting anyone join but there is a code of conduct and participation level that must be maintained for the individual to remain in the organization.

Again, the response from W.L. Gore explained a typical recruitment process but added the caveat that, “we engage team members to take on the role of "Hiring Champion" for a particular team and that commitment can rotate and change. The role is similar to a hiring manager but is not aligned to titles of manager”. To me this involvement of staff in the hiring process is imperative for the success of the new employee and the team. Too often executive level management will decide on new employees without even introducing them to the team they work on and this can result in very toxic work environments.

"How are finances acquired and managed? Are there stock options and profit sharing or even salaries- that are only available to certain members and not others?"

This next question, was again, building on previous responses to determine if the organization was being run equitably or if the control, and most importantly profits, were limited to just a few key players. I had mentioned earlier in the paper that I had to work

hard to make sure this topic was not about wealth inequality and economics but this is one of the essential elements of hierarchical power so I made sure to include this question.

The non-profits established 403b corporation status so they could accept donations that would be used to pay staff that worked in more consistent administrative manners (i.e. board members, directors). The university employees received a salary but there is no profit sharing. Level of compensation was based on role where a professor would be paid more than an administrative staff member.

One response I found to be interesting was from a company that was an employee owned entity. They said, “yes, there are long term incentive programs (LTIP) for the senior team”. From my understanding I thought an employee owned company would be the most likely to embrace non-hierarchical and equitable profit practices but this contributor replied to a previous question that they had a typical hierarchical org chart with a CEO level, etc ... He seemed to complain that this function was created when there were only 10 employees, yet the authority still remained with this individual now that the company had 185 employees. I think this shows how even in this small scope hierarchical power imbalances can develop and employee dissatisfaction with that can be a serious issue.

"Is there an internal training program in your organization? If so, please briefly describe it."

My final survey question referenced training programs and opportunities. As I indicated through my career analysis and literature review, I think that structured training processes are a critical component of any organization. Most of the respondents showed that this was the case. The GE employee once again provided a glowing endorsement stating, “Yes, lots! We have a really robust training infrastructure. You can learn just about anything you want that will support your job. If there is not a training offered by GE, the company supports ongoing education”. I imagine the philosophies proposed by Peter Drucker so long ago are in practice – in some work environments – to this day.

The contributor from the employee owned company showed that there could be promise for some to move up the ladder within the rigid structure of a hierarchical organization. They explained, “Yes, we have leadership development programs for manager level and above employees (approximately 30 individuals). In addition, we conduct open attendance Lunch and Learn sessions monthly”.

Now, for me, this is a failing at Penn. I did attend a “Step-Up” program that was very interesting, but this was just leaning with no defined outcome. The option of who would progress in their career in the organization was most often left up to the vagaries and decisions of the superiors. It would be much more beneficial if the training programs and management practices were sufficiently transparent and standardized as they seem to be at other companies.

The contributor from W.L. Gore highlighted the important lens that corporate training must focus from, “Yes. standard culture, soft skills and practices that are unique to the organization”. I found this from my own experience that the organization must constantly visit the elements of learning that help the employee to always reflect on the

mission of the organization. It is not just a mission statement but a culture and conversation that needs to be discussed consistently and an organization needs to have the processes in place that will allow for continuous growth.

I appreciate the few folks who took the time to reply to my survey and contribute to my understanding of their organizational experiences. I am not surprised by any of the responses regarding how most organizations continue to operate in hierarchical structures. I think the responses also show that non-hierarchical organizations may only apply to practices of volunteer organizations and the idea of transforming how work can be managed using non-hierarchical methodologies is still in its earliest stages.

CONCLUSION

I am now in the final phase of my odyssey at Penn. I am preparing to complete my Organizational Dynamics program by submitting this paper. When I first conceptualized the ideas for this project, I was volunteering with the Progressive Coders group and taking my final courses in the program. I had a feeling of complete euphoria that the concepts of non-hierarchical organizing and the use of social technologies to disrupt politics and business would quickly transform the world. However, as I progressed through writing this paper, I have learned that although a transformation may happen someday, the process will need to be much more pragmatic and patient regarding the powerful dynamics of existing hierarchical structures.

In the first part of this paper, I reflected on my career journey and how I had difficulty navigating the rigid processes inherent in the typical organization management. I presented this problem as caused by other people in the process – my managers or the policy. However, I admit that I never really cared much for being supervised by anyone. I always thought that I was going to break free from the chains of 9 to 5 office work and become a rock star. It seems my hippy, free-wheeling, Marxist self may have been a bigger part of the problem than the hierarchical structures I railed against. After all, if I keep running in to the same problems in all the different work scenarios - butting heads with my supervisors - maybe the problem is with me.

The literature review provided a unique, historical view on the process of hierarchical organization structure. It answered questions about what circumstances determine that some groups are in positions of power and wealth while others are

impoverished and powerless. This is a perpetual and evolving topic in which we are truly in the throes of a paradigm shift towards a more equitable and fair existence for all. The research of the non-hierarchical organizations and concepts such as holacracy are not the standard by which most of us operate. For me to understand them better required a deep dive through journal articles and in-person participation.

Comparing my work experience to how it may have been different if the organizations I was employed by used the strategies and tools that I found to be practiced in the non-hierarchical groups was enlightening. I concluded that my career was important and successful, because I successfully worked within these hierarchical modes despite the inherent biases I have against them.

In my final analysis of the survey results and literature review showed that non-hierarchical systems are not going to replace traditional hierarchical business and societal practices imminently. People are used to operating in the mode with which they are most familiar. Despite constant changes in society and in business, the structure remains the same.

With these conclusions I continue to follow social networks and the activities of various politically progressive groups which continue to drive a move from traditional power structures to more egalitarian, and hence non-hierarchical ones. This is a trend that will increase further as societal self-awareness increases.

EPILOGUE

Through my ruminations about non-hierarchical management systems it seemed that the hierarchical structures in place in the world were intractable and unchanging. There are too many structural components that result in keeping the real power in the hands of the few at the top of the corporate and wealth pyramids. Individuals may experience some measure of autonomy through working as sole-proprietors or in a “gig” economy but the top power and decision making always flowed to the elite few at the top.

As I write my final thoughts in the spring of 2020, the world has changed dramatically. The response to fighting the Covid-19 virus by corporations, small businesses, government, and non-government organizations has resulted in revolutionary transformation of how we can possibly work and live in this world going forward.

It is amazing that solutions like tele-medicine, remote work and home schooling have been rapidly implemented in a matter of just a few days. A lot of the tools such as Slack, Remote Desktop Protocol and Canvas/Panopto online learning systems have been in place for a while but were used primarily in the work and school buildings. In my work as an IT Support technician we have assisted many people to rapidly adopt this new mode of working. Many were set up already, so they just simply needed to follow simple instructions.

The established cloud technologies like Office365 and social applications like Facebook allowed most of us to stay connected through these trying times. These technologies and structures were applied to actions and solutions, and resulted in a controlled, yet collaborative, approach to behavior modification and problem solving.

Individuals took initiative for their work-life, and in their social lives, that did not require the approval of a manager or supervisor higher up in the management hierarchy.

Many people were no longer going to work at the office. Everyone found that they had more time at home and were able to finally focus on important things like family priorities. Parents adopted home-schooling practices and, again, became the primary teachers of their children. Being at home resulted in a shift in priorities where extracurricular interests had a chance to be developed with this once in a lifetime opportunity because we were all not running out the door to the next appointment or restaurant meal. We found that our hobbies and dream jobs were now front and center of importance and we leveraged the technology tools available to all of us to develop the things we always wanted to do that we did not have the time for previously.

Much, if not all, of this activity progressed without any reliance on traditional hierarchy structures of manager and employee. The status quo of working 9 to 5, in an office, for a boss was disrupted by this pandemic. Through this opportunity the potential for new models and new modes of management emerged; many of those that I discussed in this paper. Management by consensus versus edict was implemented and passed the test. We could expect to see a fundamental change in how people work, and play emerge more fully going forward.

The government provided basic income monetary relief that allowed for this precedent to be established. It is now status quo to know that it is most important for all people to have money that they can spend on the essentials required for living – food, shelter, and health care. Many of the structural changes progressive groups called for were implemented over night. I would expect to see some of these initiatives to remain

as people, corporations and governments move from this point in history forward. Maybe there is a possibility for non-hierarchical management structures after all.

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APPENDIX

Final Considerations**1. I Want to hear/ see how Susman's book informed your perspective.**

I appreciate that I had a chance to review Susman's book as a part of my Capstone. I was pleased to read how he explained the same historical foundation for mechanical work organizations based on "Taylorism" as I did in my capstone. His book then went on to describe an evolution towards a more organic and emergent model of organization that I have found in my career and have explained in my paper. Although I did not get the Susman book until late in my process, I see where a lot of these ideas support some of the conclusions that I came to.

Susman explains a difference between process-oriented work functions, such as coal mining, versus dynamically operating functions such as the customer support and technology work that I do. I like that I found the table where he demonstrates that the process work may be managed within 'low' boundary-transaction and conversion uncertainty but there is a 'high' instance of needing to manage those circumstances which is incumbent in the work that I have always done.

An important part of my premise is where the nature of work has changed in the 'post-industrial' world. Susman points out how this 'turbulence' in the parameters that place demands on how work is performed, such as the constant change in technology that I have had to support in my industry, are the conditions that allow for the emergence of 'autonomous' processes. This is a significant idea that helps me better understand some of the reasons why I have fiercely conducted my work-life in the mode of autonomy at

the level of the individual. Susman points to an autonomy of workgroup as the basic unit of organizing and I can see elements of this at play in my work as a customer service technician with responsibility for solving the single problem or task presented by my customers. At the same time, I know the value of the group of peers that I work with who approach their work in a similar manner as me, therefore enhancing the role of the ‘workgroup’ as an important organizing component.

The role of ‘redundant functions’ that Susman talks about are an important realization for me. The members of my workgroup all do the same type of work with some limited areas of specialty. This allows for the workload to be dynamically redistributed amongst ourselves often without the input from a supervisor. Some of the tensions I highlighted in the capstone were a result of our group not having sufficient staffing levels for so many years. This is the result of the management level not sufficiently dealing with the high ‘boundary-transaction uncertainty’ for which they are responsible, but this is much better as of late. I even remark all the time when people ask how my job is that it is so much better now that we have finally gotten the appropriate – and even excess – staff levels needed to do our job as a group.

There are some caveats of Susman’s that align with my thinking, but I did not realize the scope of them until late in my capstone process. He points to the phenomenon that if a workgroup is self-regulating there is less need for regulation from above. This is true in my experience and, as I have explained in my paper, it always seemed that I was left to my own devices to figure out how to solve technical problems for my customers. Realizing this is an integral component of the processes Susman explains helps me to

understand that mine, and my groups, autonomy and constant reiterative approach to problem solving is natural in the post-industrial landscape.

One element that I found to be very interesting is that there is a role for upper level management even if a work group is operating and re-inventing itself in an organic and autonomous manner. A workgroup can best determine the way to respond to customer demands but the higher-level management is responsible for the ‘boundary-transaction uncertainty’. In my industry this is the scope of work, or sets of technology, we will need to support, the demands of the business, and the appropriate process to analyze the new tools they will need to bring technology to their functions (i.e. electronic medical chart and radiology at Penn Dental).

Susman points out that if this function is not managed properly the processes can end in anarchy and I have certainly felt this at many times in my career. The higher-level managers have the authority to regulate these ‘turbulences’ where certainly, I know, the day-to-day operations work group does not. I saw this directly when new supervisors came into our group and insisted that all requests come into our ticket system so there would be an electronic record of the request, and so that all the workload could be analyzed and prioritized. The analysis would also determine if more staff would be needed and they were added because of the higher-level management of this ‘boundary-transaction uncertainty’.

Prior to these initiatives the over-worked, autonomous workgroup staff would drop what they were doing and just go take care of something that someone ‘stopped them in the hall’ to ask about. I remember being a strict proponent of the new regulated way for people to request our services probably because of my intrinsic understanding of

the value of this change, and certainly, because I was getting tired of the ‘anarchy’ that Susman warned would ensue if this uncertainty process was not managed correctly.

Susman’s book has aligned with a lot of the ideas I had in my capstone and helped me to reflect further on some the conclusions in regard to higher-level management that I may not have fully realized at first.

2. Similarly, what do you see as the 3-4 critical factors in starting an organization (vs. the nice to have things)

The critical factors needed to start an organization are vision, product, labor, and leadership. I would think there would have to be a market for the product or societal problem that the business intends to solve as well. Many businesses and organizations have started under these initial factors. I have participated personally in organizations as diverse as Progressive Coders (ProgCode), where the vision is to provide grassroots action to create software solutions to address societal problems, to performing at neighborhood bars (venues) where a single proprietor owns a few venues in my area to which I provide music services.

Organizations can provide products such as supporting social action or providing themed bar and restaurant venues which provide live music, and all of these require the need for a dedicated labor force that will provide the work required to obtain the goals of the organizations. My capstone theme has been concerned primarily with the role of labor. I guess, according to my premise it would be nice if all these organizations could simply be “founded” and operated democratically by their labor groups.

However, even ProgCode was more or less federated from a number of coding projects, as the idea of just one or two people, who decided to found an organization that would consolidate the vision, product and labor pertaining to the grassroots programming initiatives. The venues I play music at are composed of the vision of one entrepreneur who had a few partners initially, but they quickly dropped off long before the current growth of the organization, so this is now generally managed by a single founder.

The ‘nice things’ are that an organization would be fully democratically managed with consensus about all issues as the main mode of operation. Another nice thing would be an exact share of all profits for all the members of the organization. These were some of the questions I placed in the hierarchy survey for my capstone. So, this leaves the final factor of founding an organization open for discussion: leadership. Is it possible for an organization to be “led” by everyone? This was a premise of my capstone and in the final analysis it seems there is still a need to have specific individuals in a leadership position.

A group like ProgCode had to develop a role for a board of directors which would control the activity of the different projects and channels. They would allow as much autonomy as possible for the individual members and allow them to choose which projects they would work on, allow for them to move between projects, and always strive for the most non-hierarchical and democratic process for making decisions.

The bottom line for ProgCode though has been a demarcation between working with free or low-cost open source products (shareware) with programmers who were working as volunteers, more or less in a hobby mode. The need to have funding arose and the group was adamant about not taking money from any political action committees (PAC). To raise funds ProgCode needed to elect a board for the tax purposes related to

403c designation. Even with a group which is so dedicated to non-hierarchical operations it is necessary to have a higher-level leadership function. I have also seen with ProgCode where some projects left from their umbrella organization and decided to take PAC funds. There also has not really been a sustained growth of activities as there may be with an organization that is more controlled by a stronger fund raising or possibly 'for-profit' purpose.

The sole proprietor of the venues I play music at is operating in the role of founder. He got the bank loans and did the construction to re-brand the buildings he purchased; he conducts an interesting operation. I know my role here, I am the entertainer, I would never presume to tell him how I think he should run his business. I have, however, been playing exclusively at this one venue and subsequent venues he purchased for more than 13 years now. I know many other dedicated employees (labor) who have worked for him this long as well. I don't know if he has silent partners or employee panels that help in his decision making but he is a smart guy who, I expect, considers the perspectives of his employees and seeks their advice when he is making new plans.

My experience with this proprietor is a strong example of how an organization run primarily under the vision of the founder (and CEO) can be very successful. I have seen him execute his vision as he acquired additional venues and always provided support for his community and live music which is certainly something that a many other venues don't bother to do in the age of the digital jukebox. He is proud of the work he does and the employment he provides for his staff. He has a holistic approach to running

his businesses and the way his vision has resulted in an increasingly successful organization it is a great example of strong leadership by a founder.

Oh, and the “nice thing” here is I get to jam every few weeks at a nice neighborhood bar and I make a few bucks. I have stuck with this founder because I don’t have to put myself through the hassle of contacting owners at other bars, who I do not have a relationship with, trying to get other gigs at places further from my home, etc... I think many of the employees are happy with the arrangement they have with this organization as am I.

In conclusion, many organizations start the same way, with a reason for coming into existence which is based on vision and product. It may be imperative that leadership, and a configuration of operations in a hierarchical way, where leaders can exercise a higher-level of authority, is necessary for an organization to grow and thrive. However, regardless of the configuration it is important for labor to feel they are being heard and that they have a significant stake in the overall success of the enterprise.

3. How important is the type of business and its health...is it only good times that allow the indulgence of employee involvement? The holacracy folks could answer this.

I think the type of business is very important for allowing for a non-hierarchical operation or even for adopting a method for employee involvement. As I indicated above, a small business may lean more to being managed by the founder or a small group of partners. A process-oriented business such as manufacturing would continue to operate

with scientific management methods closer to those defined by Taylor so many years ago. Even in my work environment, which is academic and health care at the University of Penn, I think the vestiges of hierarchical management are fully ingrained with the structure of leadership conducted by Deans, tenured faculty and senior administrators (who usually possess significant academic credentials such as Master's degree or even doctorates themselves).

A work group composed of peers with a high level of academic training and experience could be the perfect environment for the members to attempt the more democratic and egalitarian methods required to operate in non-hierarchical ways. Even at HolacracyOne it seemed that the company was mostly professional level staff such as graphic designers and marketing professionals. I have found that the potential for adopting non-hierarchical methodologies may work best with staff that are "like minded" and have a collegial approach to communication and task management.

I do disagree with the assessment that "good times" are what are required to allow for employee involvement. In working with the Waggl team I saw that they provided a platform for providing a way for all employees, all of whom are important stakeholders with a vested interest in the success of the businesses they work within, to contribute. Waggl is one option but their methods could be implemented in many ways such as employee surveys with transparent communication about the findings. Also, it is important for leadership to develop plans based on employee feedback, and to share those plans in a comprehensive and consistent manner with all stakeholders.

As I spoke with the representative at Waggl, we both agreed that a company that would have these processes in place already would have greatly benefited in the

management of remote work options and work continuity in the current Covid-19 environment. I have seen these initiatives ‘come and go’ so many times over the years in my career. This process of comprehensive employee involvement, that results in a culture change towards continuous improvement for an organization, could be the most important thing an organization can do. These processes are not simply an ‘indulgence’ but need to increasingly become a part of the DNA of all businesses.

4. What is the role of crisis management in considering your topic?

I do not think I considered the role of crisis management in my topic off-hand. I can see where a standard hierarchy could be required to handle things such as crisis management. The current Covid-19 situation comes to mind. Our school leadership has provided excellent guidance during this crisis. With expertise in the practice of public health the leadership has provided a high level of effective communication. As opposed to leaders at other schools the experience in managing a safe operating environment in response to a health crisis is one that dean is uniquely qualified to perform as an individual, and sole leader, responsible for many of the necessary decisions. At his level of qualification, he is directly in touch with city and state government and directing the activities of researchers in a way that could not be done by committee necessarily. He has the authority to re-align the activities of the chairman and department heads to pivot what they are doing in a new direction as necessary.

However, the fully formed non-hierarchical system would have a counterpart to the expertise of an individual in that the system would consist of *functions* that manage

different components of an operation. An organization, informed by employee feedback which strives for constant improvement and dynamic change management, would include functions such as risk management and mission continuity procedures which would be well understood by everyone in the organization, as would all functions. Now it is not the job of everyone to act on a risk situation, but the processes and communication channels that are required could be more programmatic and a response could be managed by an ad-hoc workgroup or committee.

I could see a situation where a handful of people in an organization could be qualified in public health matters and they would be the key contributors to develop response when a crisis occurs and, of course, the play book for responding to a crisis would be an important component of employee feedback and continuous quality improvement. I think too often the functions like risk management and mission continuity are developed in a silo fashion in organizations and are relegated to just a few people. Just as I have seen employee engagement initiatives ‘come and go’, I have seen risk management or quality control to be a hot topic at one time and forgotten about after a while.

Another caveat of a non-hierarchical, functional management system is that it does not dispense with areas of expertise; it is not a matter of everyone does everything. Regarding the Dean and his public health experience, he would be the expert on that function but an intern from a computer science program would be the expert and authority of a technical issue for instance. This is some of the alignment of the circles and functions in a Holarctic system and there are certainly *possibilities* that methodologies

such as these can be adopted more and more as organizations, and individuals within them, continue to grow and learn more about themselves.