



WHO IS THE BOSS HERE?

NON-HIERARCHICAL MANAGEMENT IN PRACTICE

NESEHNUTI

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PREFACE

We live in a non-hierarchy, we change it, and we change ourselves along with it from the establishment of NESEHNUTI to today. It has become so self-evident to us that we have forgotten to talk about what it means to us. We fully realize that we work in something unusual only when we try to describe our non-hierarchy to those around us in a simple way. Over twenty years, our non-hierarchical decision-making has become an elaborate and unique system. Progressive changes differentiate NESEHNUTI from other non-hierarchical groups. Unlike in other organizations, changes in NESEHNUTI happen in a dynamic way. These have resulted in distinctive rules, forms of voting and self-deciding work groups.

It is precisely because of the uniqueness of our structure that about a year ago we agreed that we would like to share with others how we live in the non-hierar-

chy. With this publication, we want to familiarize you with our many years of experience and describe the advantages and pitfalls of our form of management. We hope you will find here stimuli and inspiration for your work or activism, or that this publication will awaken your curiosity and will encourage a discussion about whether you really need a boss.

The publication is a joint effort of people from NESEHNUTI. It captures our current relationship to the non-hierarchy in today's composition of people and the current working atmosphere. In a few years, the perception of our non-hierarchical management can shift completely. Therefore, take this publication as a result of our current thinking.

We wish you a fresh reading,
NESEHNUTI



WHY DO WE HAVE A NON-HIERARCHY IN NESEHNUTI?

- ▶ NESEHNUTI strives for equality and justice in society, and wants to apply these same principles to its internal functions.
- ▶ All members of the group are included in the decision-making process, everyone's voice is heard.
- ▶ Responsibility does not lie with one or a few people, but with the whole team that shares it equally.
- ▶ The absence of "from the top" commands leads to greater creativity of the team, greater variety of ideas, and thus to better solutions.
- ▶ Because the team is involved, it identifies with the decisions more easily and thoroughly.

WHERE CAN YOU COME ACROSS A NON-HIERARCHY

Non-hierarchical groupings have existed for several centuries. On the American continent, nations were involved in joint decision-making already in the fifteenth century. The North American confederation of Haudenosaunee consisted of five nations, who, at their gathering, selected one representative. The decisions were then accepted only by the consensus of all present.

In European history, non-hierarchical functioning also has its place, for example in the functioning of city councils or guilds. The roots of the Quaker Movement, or the Religious Society of Friends, reach the seventeenth century. Today, more than 350,000 members of the movement decide on the basis of an across-the-board consensus, and on the basis of a collective belief in the shared Truth, in their case the reflection of God's

will. With their decision-making, Quakers have influenced many organizations fighting for human rights or the environment, such as Greenpeace.

Today, non-hierarchical functioning is associated primarily with the autonomous anarchist movement. They see it as the basic principle of their libertarian and egalitarian ideals, which also inspires many civic initiatives engaged in environmental and peace issues or in the struggle for social justice.

Non-hierarchical functioning works well in small groups or collectives. Larger platforms, however, present a problem, as in their case it is hard to guarantee the voice of everyone will be heard. Therefore, various guidelines have been developed to accommodate non-hierarchical decision-making to the size of the



From 2013, vegan parents have been meeting in Brno. The aim was to exchange experience, information and mutual support. Thanks to this activity, the publication “We have veganism in our family” was created. It presents some of their stories.

collective – for example, splitting into independently running teams or distributing the discussions into smaller groups, from which representatives are elected to present the group’s view before a broader assembly.

Joint decision-making also permeates into education. Certain forms of non-hierarchy are pursued by so-called free or democratic schools, which involve all school staff, parents and pupils in voting on teaching, time management, conflict resolution and various day to day functions. Irrespective of age, each of them has one vote. The purpose of these schools is to develop critical thinking in children, to educate them primarily in areas they enjoy, and to teach them a sense of responsibility for classroom and school action.

In recent years, the non-hierarchical structure has also increasingly appeared in a totally different context –

small businesses and startups, often in the IT field, also strive for this model. Flat organization is sought by those who see potential in creative chaos and collaborative work. Instead of a boss, these firms have several directors that consult with other colleagues in smaller teams and their views are taken into account in the final decision.

Non-hierarchical functioning is often confused with consensual decision-making, but it is just one of the approaches. For example, groups can use a majority voting system, and the threshold for accepting a proposal can be set as needed. Another option is to combine voting with consensual decision-making, as we do in NESEHNUTI.

HOW WAS THE NON-HIERARCHICAL NESEHNUTI ESTABLISHED AND HOW HAS IT EVOLVED?

We talked about the non-hierarchy with Milan Stefanec, who was at the birth of NESEHNUTI and is the only founder of the organization still active in it. He describes how this structure came into being, how it transformed and what are its greatest pluses and minuses.

NESEHNUTI has been a non-hierarchical organization since its establishment. How did it actually happen?

NESEHNUTI was created in 1997 by splitting from the DUHA (Rainbow) Movement. One of the reasons was a disagreement with the internal authoritarian functioning of the organization and the absence of democratic principles in the internal management. At that time, the DUHA Movement, probably the most significant Czech environmental organization in the context of the Czech environment, was distinctively radical in terms of methods and topics: it adopted Western models of more radical civil movements such as a direct action, civil disobedience, opposing political parties or demanding systemic changes in the political system. However, the structure did not resemble the democratic and horizontal structures of Western civil movements. It was built on a power vertical with a strong position of unelected and irremovable governing structures.

This mainly showed in dealing with ideological and personnel issues, different views on solving various problems, or in deciding on the organization's strategy. In the case of differing opinions, the unelected Council of the organization, or its chairman, was in the end always the one making the decision by power. The other active people in the organization could not

appeal the decision, demand its revocation or have an equal voice in the choice of solutions. This was very bizarre, especially considering that in the public debate the DUHA Movement promoted such topics as public participation in decision-making. By its internal functioning, however, it worked against this principle. Nowadays the situation in the DUHA Movement is different, it has democratically elected bodies, there is democratic participation of the members and standard control mechanisms are in place.

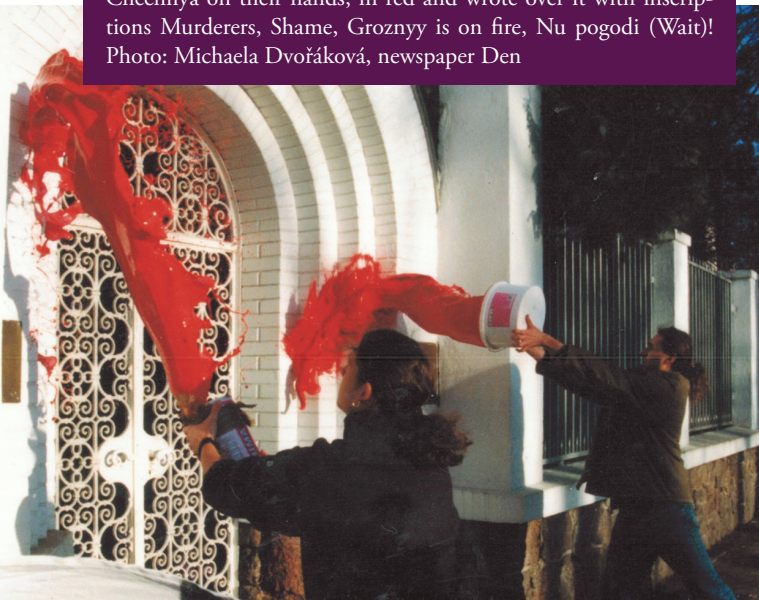
The origin of the NESEHNUTI structure is also symbolically linked to the non-violent civil blockade of the construction of the Temelin nuclear power plant in 1997. It sounds like a joke, but in my opinion it influenced the fact that we are a non-hierarchical organization. It is so especially because of the form that decisions were made at the blockade – that it was managed in a very directive and centralized way. It seems to me that it showed then how centralized and undemocratic management does not work for such actions. I can say so because I was on the management team.

We sat in a tent and received reports from individual places where the construction site of the nuclear power plant was being blocked. There were no cell phones or widespread emails at that time, so it was decided through radio and in a de facto army style on who was going to do what. Five people in the management team were deciding about five hundred blockade participants without the hundreds of people having a possibility to take part in the decision-making process. People could only follow orders from the top. The absence of participation from the blockaders themselves was to blame for the fact that occasionally they performed

absurd instructions from the management team. As a result, people were freezing for several days in the rain and “were blocking” a gate of the power plant that was not used and through which nobody wanted to pass. There was no collective decision-making, the participation of those, about whom it was being decided, was missing. So, naturally, the decision-making of the “leading” group generated bad solutions. In fact, it was on a small scale, a model of how badly politics works if it is left to professional politicians and public participation in decision-making is ruled out.

Under these circumstances, we were setting up the NESEHNUTI statues in the evenings and devising our structure, actually a bit in opposition to the hierarchical, not fully democratic structures both in society

In 1999, five activists of NESEHNUTI and SOVA painted the entrance to the Russian Consulate, as a symbol of the representatives of the Russian state carrying the blood of innocent inhabitants of Chechnya on their hands, in red and wrote over it with inscriptions Murderers, Shame, Groznyy is on fire, Nu pogodi (Wait)! Photo: Michaela Dvořáková, newspaper Den



and in civil movements. We wanted to bring in the new organization precisely the mechanism that should prevent a de facto vertical structure. Many of the participants disliked this vertical structure and at the same time it showed to be non-functioning in many respects because it generated bad decisions.

What ideological models and principles was this non-hierarchical structure built upon at that time?

One of the co-founders, Katerina Liskova, worked with feminism and ecofeminism. This, in some of its ground rules, strongly opposed hierarchical structures precisely because they place competition above participation and co-operation. It became also one of our ideological roots.

Other founders, in turn, came from the squatter environment, which also had non-hierarchy in its ideological base. And then there were people active in the anarchist environment, such as Filip Fuchs and Kristyna Rytirova, or in the radical left movement, which opposed the system and the authorities by non-hierarchy.

What was the political atmosphere at that time? Did it affect the non-hierarchical structure in some way?

I think so. For example, our three-month waiting period before a person gets the right to vote in the organization is linked, among other things, to the fact that at that time there was tremendous pressure from secret services on non-profits of our type. In 1995, there was a major incident that organizations such as Greenpeace, DUHA Movement, Children of the Earth, Animal S.O.S. and others were included among extremist organizations. It was known that in some of them the police deployed their people. Examples from abroad were known where secret services infiltrated environmental organizations in order to harm them, so we had a well-founded worry about abuse.

The workers of the anti-extremist department themselves told us that they had a file on us and regularly participated in most of our events, including information stalls in the streets. The Ministry of the Interior mentions NESEHNUTI in its 1999 report on extremism. It was only on the basis of the Supreme Court ruling that the Ministry had to withdraw this mention and apologize to us publicly. Smaller, widely open organizations are especially threatened by this approach because it only takes five agents to infiltrate, take over and discredit them.

In many ways, our decision-making rules are rather complicated and comprehensive. They are not based simply on consensual decision-making, as is the case in many other similar initiatives. Why is that so?

Paradoxically, we were led by the experience of the then anarchist environment, which in this respect presented itself as very free-thinking and open, it waved around such slogans as “free agreement,” and so on. But it was our personal experience from the practical functioning of various anarchist groups of that time which showed that without the existence of clear rules consensus was talked about, but more often than in formalized structures, it was the voice of the most vocal, authoritarian, self-assertive person or group that decided. It is hard to find defensive mechanisms against this. For a number of anarchist groups then – I do not know what the situation is now – it was true that whoever attended the meeting made the decision. They did not have membership, because membership is binding. This meant that the approved decisions were not very stable. A decision was made in the morning, and in the afternoon it changed due to a different composition of those present.

In addition, it was often decided by people who may have come to the meeting by coincidence, did not know the background of the decision, and did not bear any responsibility for the decisions made. Thus, the structure of NESEHNUTI was based on bad experience from both types of functioning – from a rigid, centralized, authoritarian, as well as from a mushy, unformalized and often non-functioning structure. Both models suffer from common shortcomings – incomplete participation by participants and low responsibility for decisions taken.

I think that the first two years we at NESEHNUTI were really deciding by consensus. It was because we were a lot fewer and we were homogeneous in our opinions. We shared a common history, the fact that we created the organization, common values and ideals. NESEHNUTI was also primarily a protest movement. With a bit of exaggeration, it was clear what we were against – corporations were bad, political establishment was bad, the government was bad, and capitalism as such was bad. This connected us, so we achieved consensus more simply and we voted only a few times a year.

Today the composition of the organization is more diverse, people come from diverse backgrounds, have diverse life experience, age and education. In addition to protest, our work is also focused on promoting positive solutions, which is, I think, good, but it requires a slightly different approach to decision making.

Today it is no longer an organization where everyone decides on everything, since, because of a variety of tasks and agendas, more competence is left to smaller groups. When did the turning point arrive?

When NESEHNUTI was being founded, it was completely unable to delegate authority, I think the decisions were made in the style “everyone about every-

thing". This means that when a press release was being published – fewer than today were issued – it was written by three people and another fifteen discussed each column. Actually, it was somewhat fun. In addition, the meetings took place only once a week back then. People looked forward to them, because it was an opportunity to see friends, to discuss, to argue, and then to go to the pub together.

Only later some kind of autonomy of the groups appeared, employees and programs today have the principle of trust. This means that they can do *de facto* what they want, as long as they respect basic rules of the organization. Only when they do something that seriously violates the rules and values of the organization, the team takes away that authority. In practice, nobody checks the contents of a press release of the anti-award Sexist Piggy, no one checks how the Initiative Way prepares the BarCamp for initiatives in the South Caucasus, but if they caused some serious trouble, the team can stop their activities.

This was based on experience with the branches of the organization, who in the past refused to respect jointly accepted rules and in their activities deliberately overstepped or circumvented them. Due to this, defensive mechanisms had to be developed, but at the same time we wanted to maintain the principle of trust among the cooperating teams.

When were the General Assembly and the Council of NESEHNUTI included in the statutes of the organization?

Their origins are connected to one branch – in the past probably the most powerful branch – of NESEHNUTI that was in Vysoké Myto and was led by an anarchist. The branch was active in various areas, led local campaigns against traffic, against the Nazis and was

really super. They themselves voted on various rules, because they disagreed, for example, when we in Brno wrote a letter to the Minister of the Environment and did not start by calling him a sold-out capitalist idiot, but we wrote to him about a specific thing. Then they actually enforced a rule that when the organization as a whole addresses top representatives, it should decide on it by consensus, or there was some, I suppose, a four-fifth majority.

And then it all ended when fourteen days after the approval of this rule, those in Vysoké Myto wrote to Václav Klaus (the then Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies, lower house of the Parliament of the Czech Republic) that the government must free innocent anti-fascists, who were simply redskins (*editor's note: radical leftist, often aggressive skinheads*), who in Otrokovice and Zlín beat some bold people bloody. Maybe they were Nazis and maybe not, but they almost killed them. And it was a real mess, the rest of NESEHNUTI was sharply against any violence, even that against Nazis. It was also a moment when we realized that we must have clear mechanisms and rules when we talk about something as a whole organization. So, thanks to this incident, some formalized structures, such as the thematic and organizational groups started to emerge and they were delegated a certain authority. And as these groups emerged, mechanisms were created to supervise them.

We were seeking a balance between what everybody must and can decide in NESEHNUTI and what is, for example, due to a lack of time or operativeness, possible to decide by an elected body of the organization. This is why we have tried to maintain the principle that the highest decision-making body in the organization is the General Assembly of all persons with a voting right. And any decision by the Council of NESEH-

NUTI – in case of disagreement with it – may be canceled by the General Assembly, even with retroactive effect.

In doing so, we retained the principle that although people in the organization can delegate some powers to a person, that person is, nonetheless, permanently under control, they are revocable at any time, or their decision can be cancelled in the case of majority opposition. It is also a safeguard to ensure that the Council does not become a power body that arbitrarily decides and promotes its own will whatever it is. Many people told us that this rule was stupid, that it would not pass and we would not be able to register such statutes, but we succeeded and we have had it in the statutes until today. We discussed it strongly again during the last change of the statutes (*editor's note: in connection with the new Civil Code*), but we defended this rule even during the new registration of the association.

Non-hierarchical structure also requires the ability to listen, to leave room for discussion and not to be dominant. Today we are working hard on this in the organization, was it like this in the past?

At the beginning of NESEHNUTI, the conversations were far more disorderly, more spontaneous, more personal, sometimes insulting, often we did not listen to each other, we shouted over one another, we had no experience how to have a discussion. We learned it on the go and most often from our own mistakes. In the early beginnings, it could work like this, we all knew each other well, had very similar views of things. When you say a harsh word to a friend in a conversation, it does not mean that after the discussion you will not go for tea or wine together.

But when NESEHNUTI was changing from a protest homogeneous initiative into a functioning organiza-



A happening highlighting the problematic construction of a hobbymarket in Brno-Ivanovice in 2007. Ten years later, Brno City Hall decided that the hobbymarket was built illegally.

tion and the structure was still set for a small group of friends, the form of communication we were used to was hell and was not sustainable in the long run. Over time, we also lost the joy from discussions, debates, arguments, or a joint search for solutions. There were many decision-making meetings to which we were arriving not knowing if we would quarrel so much that we would break apart. And I am not exaggerating.

Our last conceptual meeting and strategic planning in the spring of 2017, on the other hand, was a big school in non-hierarchy for me. Despite the fact that we were closed together in one building for a week and often conferred long into the night, our discussions were matter-of-fact, effective, listening, polite.

Our non-hierarchy does not suit everyone, for some people it was even a reason for leaving...

When we choose new people for the organization and ask them if they can imagine working in our non-hi-

erarchical environment, they are all thrilled that they will not have any boss, and they all say yes. But then they often find out how demanding it is. For example, one ex-employee said when she was leaving, “I kind of like how you work, but I cannot work in that structure because I want to be praised by a boss, or I want my boss to say that I did something wrong, but I am not able to solve this or to enforce my proposals in front of twenty people.”

When looking for the disadvantages of non-hierarchical structures, one of them is that decisions are often adopted in the presence of a bigger group of people. Proposals are discussed, arguments are presented, and there are often conflicts to be solved. It is also important whether the participants of the discussion are able to react quickly, to explain, to search for accurate words, to defend certain attitudes, or to oppose colleagues’ suggestions. However, this is disadvantageous

for people who do not like to enter an argument, who need more time to think, who prefer to communicate in a different way, and do not like speaking in front of a group of people. In our decision-making mechanisms of NESEHNUTI we seek ways to also fully involve these people, and how to gain their ideas, suggestions, opinions; for example, we send background material for important decisions in advance or choose other forms of decision-making than just raising one’s hand at the assembly. But I think that we still lack some more effective ways to better involve these people in the organization. The challenge is to find them.

The non-hierarchical structure in NESEHNUTI is a little distorted also by the fact that people with the right to vote have a slightly higher salary than those without it. When was this rule introduced?

There was a period when the number of people with the right to vote in the organization was decreasing. We first accepted people for whom NESEHNUTI became a job, some of the branches finished their activities and we were becoming a small organization. In the worst period, only seven or eight people had the right to vote, which, according to us, was inadequate, given that decision-making in a wider collective was one of the principles on which NESEHNUTI was built. That’s why Filip Fuchs came up with a proposal of a small bonus pay for those employees who also have the right to vote and co-decide on the fate of the organization. The bonus was to be both motivational and a pay for the extra work that people with the right to vote have to do beyond their job responsibilities. And then the proposal, after big and stormy debates, passed in the vote, narrowly, but it passed. And since then it has been impossible to abolish, it has been in force for ten years, although proposals for its abolition appear on average once a year.

A happening bringing attention to the approaching end of the opportunity to comment on an update of the Brno Spatial Plan in 2011.



COMMUNICATION

In a non-hierarchical collective, it is important to keep the individual interests and interests of the group in balance while communicating. Sometimes, one has to suppress their need to express themselves in favor of efficiency, or to allow everyone's opinion to be heard. This is one of the reasons why communication and development is a key skill (not only) in a non-hierarchical collective.

In joint meetings, the non-hierarchical team uses facilitation more than “managing the meeting”. The facilitator leads through the process and topic of the meeting and takes into account the inclusivity of the environment (he or she gives space to different opinions). All this in an effort to maximize efficiency.

In its development, NESEHNUTI tries to utilize various communication and developmental methods such as team supervision, feedback or non-violent communication.

Team supervision helps us to perceive and reflect upon our own work and relations, find new solutions to problematic

situations. Regular supervision (six times a year) has been carried out for many years by supervisor Michal Horak, who has written a short chapter for this publication (see pages 27-28).

We use also feedback as a team. We meet regularly to discuss the successes of individuals or teams, what they struggled with and what we want to do differently. Once in a while, each one of us then has a possibility to hear a view of his or her work from the outside.

Non-violent communication is a communication process developed by psychologist Marshall Rosenberg in the 1960s. Non-violent communication involves observing without evaluation, realization of feelings, understanding the needs hidden behind the feelings, and expressing one's needs in a non-violent manner. You can find more about the topic at the Czech website www.nenasilnakomunikace.org or the English Center for Nonviolent Communication (www.cnvc.org).

We fight against sexism in advertising by announcing the anti-award Sexist Piggy, where the public nominates sexist ads, and then selects the most sexist. We want to point out the issue of unethical sexist advertising by changing – remarking the ad as sexist.



BUT YOU HAVE A DIRECTOR, RIGHT? (FAQS)

With non-hierarchy it is almost like with vegetarianism and veganism – soon comes the time when you have to tell people around you that your organization functions in a non-hierarchical way. Very quickly someone asks if your director has already signed something or who can make a decision on something practical. And then you have to tell the truth: the director will not sign anything, because he or she does not exist, and we decide everything together. In a similar way we try to explain the essence of our functioning to people who, for example, apply for a job with us. Soon similar questions come up:

SURE, NON-HIERARCHY. BUT YOU HAVE A DIRECTOR, RIGHT?

No, we really do not. We have a person who signs documents for the organization, but herself or himself has no powers. He or she can only sign what we approve together. In practice, it works as follows: when we, for example, accept a new employee, we all vote on the acceptance. Based on this vote, one person then signs a contract of employment. Similarly, if we decide to terminate cooperation with someone, we must all agree on it, or vote by a two-thirds majority.

WHO APPROVES YOUR VACATION?

Common processes are similar in a non-hierarchical organization as in hierarchical teams, just with more people involved. For example, we ask for vacation at joint meetings, and at the same time we inform which joint activities we are going to miss. The advantage of this system is that we accommodate each other as much as possible and it is not a problem, for example,

to use a combination of vacation and unpaid leave for two months (although this is not the rule).

HOW DO YOU KNOW WHAT YOU ARE SUPPOSED TO WORK ON?

One of the most important things in a non-hierarchical organization is the emphasis on a high degree of personal responsibility and self-organization. We do not want to say we are the most organized individuals under the sun, but structuring our own work belongs to each of our regular days. Each of us has their unique job description, where it is written in quite a detailed way what he or she has to do, what they have responsibility for and what he or she cooperates on with others. We update our job description and approve it every six months. However, there are also tasks that are operational or one-off in nature and concern the entire organization – we distribute them on a running basis and try to share them equally.

IF I DO NOT DO ANYTHING, WILL YOU STILL PAY ME?

Often people ask us if a system where no one seems to check on us cannot be more easily exploited. Just as in hierarchical collectives, also in a non-hierarchical one there is a threat that someone will just “get on the bandwagon”. Let us remember, for example, that in Spain they discovered the many-years absence of a certain official only when they wanted to give him a watch for his excellent work. In an organization of our size, on the one hand, there are enough mechanisms for overseeing our work, but also it is quickly found out if someone does or does not fulfill the assigned tasks.



The voting of NESEHNUTI at the conceptual meeting in September 2017. With the growing number of people inside the organization, the method of simply raising a hand became confusing, therefore, in larger forums we use color papers – one color is for people with the right to vote, the second is for the others.

DOES IT NOT TAKE TOO MUCH TIME?

Balancing efficiency and sufficient space for discussing individual decisions is a constant task for a non-hierarchical team. If a topic needs to be discussed thoroughly enough that one is able to make a decision in a team of, for example, fifteen people, it will of course take more time than if one person or a small group needs to decide. On the other hand, it is very rare (but it does happen) that our decision is questioned by somebody or that somebody would be unwilling to cooperate on the decision. This allows us to save time when compared to hierarchical collectives, as they need to devote it to explaining the sense of the decision to their subordinates. We know the sense of our decision, and we know its strengths and weaknesses.

EVERYONE IS RESPONSIBLE, SO THAT MEANS NOBODY IS, RIGHT?

Perception of responsibility is to some extent an individual matter. Someone is stifled by responsibility, somebody is strengthened. In a non-hierarchical collective, shared responsibility is the advantage. To some extent, however, we all perceive it, and when we vote we know we carry our part of the responsibility. Many votes are nominal, so it is possible to find out who voted for what even years later.

DO YOU NOT QUARREL ALL THE TIME?

Sometimes we have sharper attitudes at meetings, but we mostly argue for things calmly. This is also contributed to by the fact that we are constantly educated in communication.

HOW ARE OUR LIVES IN NON-HIERARCHY?



PETRA HAVLIKOVA

member of the Women's Rights
Are Human Rights Program

Non-hierarchy has brought to my life a way of working and human functioning that is very close to me. It is often mistaken for a way of control in which one can get rid of responsibility (everyone is responsible, so nobody is). And it's just the opposite, in my opinion. Responsibility, engagement, and freedom are actually the things that life in a non-hierarchy has brought me the most. And also an increased level of reflection not only on my actions, but also of other interpersonal relations. For me, non-hierarchy is, like democracy, a system of checks and balances – it balances the interests of individual parties, is interested in the needs and will not let you bathe in power or slip into a non-consensual way of thinking. It is in this respect that the non-hierarchy has brought me a lot in work and personal life.



BARBORA BAKOSOVA

member of the Civic Eye Program

For me, non-hierarchy has always been a great challenge and at the same time I like moving around in it. It's because I feel that a person can grow and develop a lot in it. In non-hierarchy, one learns to listen, communicate, learns patience and working with a group. These are values that are important throughout life. Sometimes it is challenging in terms of time, emotions, as well as capacities, but the communication is a big plus that surpasses everything. I now have the opportunity to try working both in a non-hierarchical and a hierarchical collective. The work in the hierarchical group is certainly pleasant in some ways – one only has to do his or her job within his or her scope and is not distracted by a share in the management of the entire organization. On the other hand, a person is more detached from the organization's aim. I like to have insight from different levels of functioning, I like to learn new things, I want to understand the processes that I do not know so much (such as financial), and so from this perspective I prefer non-hierarchy.

IRENA MARKOVA

Financial Coordinator and member of the Initiative Way Program

I like to work in non-hierarchy. It seems beautiful to me how everyone has room for their initiative and how dynamic and ever-pulsating environment it is. It is pulsating with thoughts, ideas and ideals. I like that the system itself throws out those who don't have their heart in it and keeps the good from everyone. I also perceive many limitations of non-hierarchy, in the end, I tried to express and summarize them in the chapter on pitfalls. However, I believe that non-hierarchy has a sense and a strong potential, it creates a strong group aiming at the same goal, and that is very impressive.



TATIANA DUMBRAVA

member of Together towards Diversity

What is interesting to me at this point about non-hierarchy is that the bigger the team, the more demanding it is. We are getting more formalized and we have a lot of rules. For me, it is a challenge to find the happy medium between having necessary rules and at the same time not being too formalized. Non-hierarchy is also a challenge for me in the field of communication – I am interested in how to listen to all voices, how to be sufficiently inclusive, especially in an environment where we are all accustomed to promoting our views. I would like us to be able to communicate so that the system is open – so that our main goal is not to push something through, but to reach the best goal, even if somebody else finds it.



KRISTYNA PESAKOVA

member of the Women's Rights
Are Human Rights Program

For me, non-hierarchy is a very important value, so I have never really considered that another system could be more appropriate. It is, in fact, one of the fundamental reasons why I am in NESEHNUTI. Before, I had worked in an organization where I had a classical superior and it did not suit me. This is a reason why I could appreciate the functioning of NESEHNUTI even more.



JIRI KOZELOUH

Program Director of DUHA Movement,
Associate of NESEHNUTI and formerly a long-time employee

I personally did not feel bad in a non-hierarchy at all. However, in terms of thinking about the development of the organization and achieving campaign goals, I had second thoughts. Non-hierarchy brings an opportunity for greater personal responsibility for oneself and for the surroundings, but at the same time it makes it easier to neglect this responsibility. The advantage of a non-hierarchy is that it motivates people to engage more in discussions and brings the need to address interpersonal relations with great care. However, my focus has always been on results, on achieving specific goals and improvements in the area that I dealt with. And for such an approach, I prefer an arrangement where strategic issues are solved with utmost regard to the views of everyone and with the ultimate responsibility of a particular person. I do not know if it is a morally right or fair organization of society, but I believe it is functional in terms of the aim of a campaign non-governmental organization. And that is the most important thing for me. However, if an organization has as its goal cultivation of a non-hierarchical society, then it is definitely good to apply it to itself.

HOW DOES IT WORK AT NESEHNUTI IN PRACTICE?

We manage NESEHNUTI in a non-hierarchical decision-making manner, which is also referred to as a horizontal decision-making structure. Everything is decided by the whole organization, i.e. by all the people with the right to vote (PRV). A two-thirds majority in favor of the discussed proposal is required for the decision to be valid. People with the right to vote do not necessarily need to be employees of the organization, volunteers can also gain the right to vote. This is also true the other way round – an employee does not necessarily have the right to vote.

THE RIGHT TO VOTE

In NESEHNUTI, we want to make decisions primarily by a consensus, if it is not possible to reach, we vote.

Everybody can vote, but only the votes of the people with the right to vote are binding. Nonetheless, the opinion and voting of people without the right to vote is of great importance in NESEHNUTI. People without “PRV” status are actively encouraged to express their views in the discussion and to vote by their consultative voice. The majority view of all participants of the debate is considered to be crucial, and for people with the right to vote it is important information for making their own judgment.

Any person, whether employed, an external collaborator or volunteer, can apply for the right to vote at any forum (working meeting, mailing list, personal informal meeting). The person responsible for the record of

people with the right to vote clearly informs the team who and when applied for the right to vote.

From the moment of request, a three-month period begins, during which people with the right to vote monitor how the applicant is involved in co-ordination, in which direction he or she wants to develop the organization, and the like. In this waiting period, the person is invited to the general assembly meetings and meetings of the local group.

Upon expiry of this deadline, the next assembly of the local group will vote on granting or not granting the right to vote. Only those people who currently have the right to vote can vote on new applicants and the decision is made by a two-thirds majority.

The right to vote of each of us obliges us to participate actively in the internal management of the organization. One has to participate in a prescribed number of individual meetings and actively vote per rollam (a way where decisions are made by correspondence or through technical means). In addition, everyone who has the right to vote is obliged to observe the statutes of the association, such as non-violent behavior in connection with NESEHNUTI activity, not damaging the reputation of the association or active participation in the work of the organization.

A person with the right to vote has the possibility to submit proposals, suggestions and comments; to participate and vote at the assembly of the local group and at the General Assembly meeting; to vote and to

be elected to the bodies of the association; submit a suggestion for the removal of the right to vote from another person; to participate in the activities organized by the association.

At the request of the person concerned, the right to vote may be suspended or revoked. In some serious situations, in breach of duties, the right to vote may also be withdrawn by the Council of the association.

CONSENSUS

Consensual decision-making is a process of reaching an agreement that takes maximum account of collective agreement and 100% support for proposed solutions. Consensus goes beyond the limits of compromise or, on the contrary, unanimity by trying to include all the key ideas and doubts and make from them an all-inclusive decision. Similar to non-hierarchical functioning in general, consensual decision-making is built on listening to each other, a dialogue between equal people and a dynamic discussion with an emerging outcome.

Unlike in voting, everyone present must agree on the solution, otherwise a conclusion is not reached. This means that the approved decision has a firmer foundation because it enjoys the support of the whole team, but on the other hand it also means that it requires

considerable time and a disciplined, focused and tolerant group.

Consensus is definitely the most democratic way of making decisions in a group. However, in NESEH-NUTI we have always combined it with voting. The vote for us usually represents a back door when we are stuck on a problem for a long time or when the group is too polarized. Also, raising hands in voting is a binding and tangible consent with the proposed motion, in which everyone realizes the importance of their decision.

If you want to know more about consensus, we recommend A Consensus Handbook, booklet of the collective Seeds for Change, which can be downloaded for free at www.seedsforchange.org.uk.



Frequency of meetings that are obligatory for the co-management of the organization.

	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
Operational	4x	4x	4x	4x	4x	4x	4x	4x	4x	4x	4x	4x
Financial												
Campaign												
Organizational												
General												
Conceptual	3 days					3 days						

WORKING MEETINGS

For co-management of the organization and joint decision-making, regular periodicity of working meetings is essential. Each of the meetings has a specific agenda and a certain type of binding resolutions.

For successful negotiation and effective joint agreements, well-prepared and timely background materials are key tools. Nobody in the organization, of course, is an expert on all the areas we jointly decide on. It is therefore very important how well and transparently the matter was communicated in advance. Without feeling the decision-making is well-informed and conscious, people with the right to vote usually raise their hands neither for nor against the given proposal, which is then postponed to the next relevant meeting. This can cause undesirable downtime. Therefore, it is in the interest of all to prepare and study well the background materials before the discussion.

At the meetings, there are always people appointed that record and facilitate the meeting. We alternate in these roles. A record is always made and the resolutions adopted are written into an online system of rules, where

you can search and click through related documents and approved guidelines.

PROGRAMS, INITIATIVE GROUPS AND THEIR AUTONOMY

NESEHNUTI has always been divided into individual thematic programs and initiative groups for individual activities. Each such group typically consists of two to six people (both employed and volunteer). These teams work on their activities, jointly discuss the direction and goals of activities, jointly develop strategic plans of the program or initiative group and of individual campaigns, according to their visions they write grant applications and address donors to ensure funding and necessary continuity of their activities, including salaries of their people.

They regularly present their work at the meetings of the organization and the wider team checks both the ideological direction of activities, and the funding of activities and people. The teams providing the operational side of the organization – the financial team, fundraising team, PR team, HR team, technical office administration, etc. – operate in a similar way, on principle of trust.

CONTENT OF INDIVIDUAL MEETINGS

Operational – as the name suggests, this is the most frequent meeting where we deal with operational issues of the management of the organization related to office, personnel affairs, finances and PR.

Financial – focuses on financial management issues, such as cash flow, financial management of projects, budget of the organization, and more.

Campaign – this is a regular meeting over the content of our campaigns and activities where we present them to the others in the organization and consult our future plans.

Organizational – a bigger meeting at which we deal with issues that concern the whole organization. The topic is, for example, how our team of individual fundraising or PR are doing, or how the work with volunteers evolves.

General Assembly – is mandatory only for the people with the right to vote, this is where we elect the statutory representative and the Council, and approve the budget and the end-of-the-year financial accounts of the organization.

Conceptual – the largest meeting of the year. It takes three days and considers comprehensively how we have been doing in the past period, how we want to develop, we discuss and vote on strategic decisions, and we discuss our activities in depth.

The number and frequency of meetings are not set in stone. At a time when fewer people worked in NESEHNUTI, there were fewer meetings, and there was also a time when we had more meetings. The frequency of meetings is also subject to joint agreement and can be updated at any time.

TASK FORCES

It sometimes happens that a certain complex need arises that requires solving by a team, but it exceeds the competencies of individual job descriptions, so it affects more people, but no one specifically.

In such cases, a temporary task force is formed on the basis of an agreement. Members of these are, of course, all those who are directly affected by the agenda, those who are most interested in resolving it, and, as a rule, the biggest opponents of the proposed solutions. This ensures that the main focus of the discussion about the possible contradiction is shifted to the meetings of this working group and the wider team is later presented with a proposal including solutions to all the key areas.

STATUTORY REPRESENTATIONS

Because of the necessity of legal representation, and since it is administratively demanding for the entire collective to be the statutory body, NESEHNUTI chooses its statutory representative on a regular basis. Prior to 2016, the election took place every six months, now it is once a year.

The statutory representative has no special powers, he or she is one of the voters, can discuss and defend their opinion, but has to submit to the majority decision (if consensus is not reached) and, accordingly, sign contracts and binding agreements. His or her duties are mainly the legal representation of the organization. The statutory representative must also sign a decision that they voted against, but the others voted for – this is the best proof that he or she has no special decision-making power.

NESEHNUTI team at a conceptual meeting and strategic planning in early 2017.



STRATEGIC PLAN

The Strategic Plan emerged as a tool of self-management in NESEHNUTI in 2012. And from then on we swear by it. We have also taken the methodology of strategic planning to the functioning of individual programs and initiative groups. We strategically plan individual fundraising and PR as well as staffing. This method seems to be very popular with us mainly because the aspired goals and the timetable of the activities are drawn up on the basis of an in-depth joint discussion and the document is thus a binding document of joint agreement.

At the same time, many people are very interested in its fulfillment, so joint supervision is functional. And there is nobody who can sweep this common “deal” aside.

If you are interested in what our strategic plan looks like, check out our website (strategic plan only in Czech): www.nesehnuti.cz/nase-principy.

SALARY (IN-EQUALITY)

In NESEHNUTI, people have the same gross salary at all positions, but people with the right to vote (PRV) have a smallish bonus. This financial benefit is intended to be a reward for the responsibility of co-managing the organization and at the same time an incentive tool for other employees.

For a large part of the staff, this higher gross salary for PRV is a controversial topic. The bonus violates equality in reward for work and is therefore an element that violates non-hierarchy. The proposal to abolish this inequality in gross wage has been submitted and discussed several times in recent years, but so far it has never passed by the necessary two-thirds majority of people with the right to vote. The breaking point occurred very recently, in January 2018, when the majority finally voted for equal salaries.

It should be noted that the higher gross wage for people with the right to vote has its opponents, as well as supporters both in the ranks of people with the right to vote and without it.

The above-described practical functioning of NESEH-NUTI is not a universal manual, and in fact, it is not a manual at all on how to do non-hierarchy. Rather, it is a practical description of how it works in our organization and can serve as inspiration. The structure of our management has evolved over a long period of

time and will never stop evolving because it has to respond to current needs and the situation in the organization. And this is also the best manual for others: to think constantly and creatively about which is the most effective way that leads to the best results for you specifically.

OTHER EXAMPLES OF NON-HIERARCHICAL MANAGEMENT OF ORGANIZATIONS

SOCIOCRACY is based on sociology, cybernetics and theory of management. All decisions in sociocracy are based on the principle of consent, which means here that nobody is fundamentally against and all objections and concerns are discussed. This is radically different from consensus where everyone should agree without any reservations. The organizational structure of sociocracy is based on circles, within which decisions are made (Sociocratic Circle Method) and one of which can be central. These circles are autonomous to a great degree and are interconnected through people (leaders, representatives) that participate in decision-making in their own circle and defend the interests of this circle in the next higher circle. They become a part of the higher circle, providing the necessary feedback between circles in both directions (double feedback). Representatives are regularly elected by consent after a discussion (sometimes several rounds of it) within the circle. Sociocracy is based on equality, efficiency and transparency. The group should clarify its objective, mission, vision and common values. The meetings of circles have their facilitators and a set structure from proposal through discussion to adoption of the proposal. At present, sociocracy is used as a way of managing a variety of companies and organizations, there are also sociocratic centers and sociocratic schools. This style of management is most widely spread in the Netherlands where its leading protagonists Kees Boeke and Gerard Endenburg lived.

HOLACRACY is a decentralized management system that is compared to sociocracy, on which it is also partly based. It is, however, a newer method of management, which was introduced only in 2007 by Brian Robertson when the constitution of the holacracy was born. The building blocks of holacracy are areas of work determined by their mission, which defines each circle. These areas may be altered as the organization develops. Circles that make up holacracy are self-organized and each circle has its purpose and responsibility. Circles are linked through two individuals that are part of two circles and a wider circle that follows the organization's overall strategy. Holacracy uses so-called integrative decision making. Input from all parties is to be incorporated into the proposed changes that are intended to aim at the set target. Holacracy is based on autonomy and freedom of an individual. Each individual in the organization has the highest authority in how to achieve goals and mission, which is supportive of action and innovation. What is specific to holacracy is the way in which tactical meetings of circles take place, since members of the circles help each other with everyday agenda and they discuss the most effective steps to achieve the goals of each member. Holacratic management is used by some for-profit companies.

PITFALLS OF NON-HIERARCHY

Yes, even non-hierarchy has its pitfalls. For twenty years we have been constantly encountering doubts that you can govern an organization in this way. And we are still here. However, we do not want to hide the limits and pitfalls that need to be kept in mind. On the contrary, we want to share them frankly. You may also know these pitfalls or some of them from a hierarchical environment. They may not all be connected only to non-hierarchical management of an organization.

CONSTANT NEW INCENTIVES FOR SELF-GOVERNANCE OF THE ORGANIZATION

A non-hierarchical organization is constantly under “a total reconstruction”. You have to endure that. The inner environment keeps absorbing minor or more important stimuli from its people. Ideas and thoughts are sometimes really tiny, such as “Why don’t we put the plates on another shelf in the kitchen? They will be more accessible,” sometimes they are more fundamental, “I propose that we abolish the bonus pay for people with the right to vote.” One must keep up with the pace and not lose the thread to understand all these changes.

We can stumble across a pitfall when we start doing too many things. For example, NESEHNUTI, with only about twenty people, has been through a period when, in addition to its regular extensive duties, it was able to create a new website, handle the potential move of the office, prepare a bombastic celebration of the birthday of the organization, organize several internal training sessions, deal with theoretical and practical

aspects of non-hierarchy, prepare papers, lead discussions and write a publication on this topic.

All of this from our own human capacities, without increasing workloads or dropping the everyday agenda defined by everyone’s job description. Such a situation can lead to overwork and burnout of people in the organization, a failure to perform tasks and not completing things to 100%.

Unfortunately, we do not have a universal answer how to avoid such situations. We try to balance the organization’s pressure on what needs to be done with care for employees – we keep an eye on whether their working pace exceeds a bearable limit, and we try to relieve them of their tasks when possible.

Nevertheless, we are far from the ideal state and as employers, we want to become better in this area. Care for employees is therefore one of our strategic goals (see the Strategic Plan, p. 22).

THE COLLECTIVE AS AN EMPLOYER

A major hurdle to a non-hierarchical organization is when an individual is an employee of a collective and, as part of the collective, also employs all others.

A big problem comes when someone stops working well and at the same time does not have enough self-reflection to evaluate their situation at least partly and, if possible, to actively ask for help. In such a situation the team gets into a tight corner.



We wanted newcomers – refugees – to have a better life here. In 2013, we organized in Brno for them and their friends a festival Skamasi, which celebrated their culture, music and cuisine.

It is particularly difficult for a non-hierarchical team to deal with if the reasons for the long-term problems are as complicated phenomena as a burnout syndrome, long-term disagreement in the team, or ongoing unsettled interpersonal disharmony.

Such cases are solved by a group of people that take care of staff questions in the organization – we call this team a personnel department. This group is in charge of, for example: recruitment, care for employees, or mentoring new people in the organization. In addition, it is also their task to solve conflicts in the team and give feedback on performance: it guides the negotiation process, looks for solutions, maps needs and interprets options. It also has the opportunity to use the institute of individual supervision that they can offer both to a particular person and to the whole team. Complicated cases evolve in this way even for several months.

At first glance, the whole thing is “delayed”. On the other hand, the process is as transparent as possible in this way. Ultimately, it is acceptable for all the parties to agree with the adopted final decision and stand behind it. Personnel department activity represents one of the most demanding tasks in the organization due to the need to address sensitive personal and work situations and requires a great deal of empathy and understanding.

DEGREE OF PERSONAL INITIATIVE

In our organization, tasks are not assigned to a particular person. Sometimes, after a discussion, we recommend that the task be taken by the most competent person, but most often people take the tasks themselves. It may happen that there will be a “two-speed” mode in the meetings – some over-eager individuals

take too many tasks, others take a back seat. The eager ones are prone to overwork and at the same time, developing a sense of resentment with those who just are on the bandwagon. The former may lead to an absolute burnout, the latter to serious disruption of both human and work relations. Therefore, it is necessary for the degree of engagement to take up the tasks be distributed as fairly as possible in the collective so that nobody feels injustice. But how to do this? Certainly, it is necessary to estimate well one's personal time availability and to determine one's maximum, which one does not want to overstep in the working process. The solution can also be attempted by people in the personnel department, who will reveal these differences in solving tasks on time, and will give feedback on the work of those who take on both too much and too little.

ENDLESS DISCUSSION

We discuss everything – which most of us love. However, there are situations when we are stuck on one point, for example, for an hour, we cannot find a way

out of it and devise an appropriate solution. After such a long time, we can no longer concentrate, think constructively, and due to fatigue we are able to approve almost anything.

Unproductive debates are a common disease of non-hierarchical groups. Is it possible to avoid them in any way? The solution is definitely not their time limitation, it rather leads to decisions made under pressure and omission of some opinions. In non-hierarchy, what is essential is the initiative of people who think about inner settings and problems, try to find a solution and present it to others. The basis is a good articulation of what we want to communicate. Formulating your own attitude is a complex process, especially when it is to be understood by a wider group. It is equally difficult to listen to and understand others well. Not everyone has the same good argumentation skills and promptness to react.

New people are especially disadvantaged, if they have no experience with such things. It is therefore important that their voice is not ignored and that they feel more and more confident in formulating their questions and answers.

For discussions not to become unnecessarily lengthy, one has to work on their communication skills, to learn to enter discussion with factual comments, not to repeat the arguments of others, but to present only those that have not yet been voiced and to abstain from commentaries that would be emotional or offensive (for more about communication see box on the page 13).



In 2015, we delivered humanitarian aid from Brno to Ukraine – food, nappies, hygiene supplies and others in a total value of almost eight hundred thousand CZK (thirty thousand euros).

SEVEN FEATURES OF THE DEMANDING NON-HIERARCHY — THE VIEW OF OUR SUPERVISOR

Michal Horak,
supervisor of NESEHNUTI for many years

Those who say something is impossible should not disturb those who are already doing it.

The Gospel Truth

At the beginning of this text, I want to clarify that I have no theoretical awareness of the functioning of non-hierarchy in a team, its strengths or weaknesses. This text is a summary of many years of experience with team supervision and captures my personal, empirically based views on the functioning of a non-hierarchical organization.

When I first heard the notion of a non-hierarchical organization, it seemed to me that the spirit of mythical golden times breathed on me, together with a fresh breeze of a bright, enlightened future. A mythical as well as future desired reality where people are essentially and thoroughly wise beings who can and want to find an agreement to general satisfaction and do not need any superiors or leaders.

I like the phrase “demanding situations”, because this term contains the word “demand” – the demand that we manage, overcome and accomplish something. In this text I briefly outline the seven demands which, from my point of view, non-hierarchy claims from those who want to live and survive within this system.

First demand: Demand of responsibility

Non-hierarchy is demanding because of the high level of responsibility that it places and with which it sometimes perhaps even overwhelms individual members of

the team. Everyone on the team is responsible not only for their work, but also for the whole organization and through this, even indirectly, also for the work of their colleagues. Whoever accepts this demand is on the way to overload and then burnout. Strong tensions occur when the “overresponsible” clash with the irresponsible, or, seen from a different perspective, people who are genuinely engaged and people working in an engaged organization. On the team there is not a defined and authorized person who would limit “overresponsible” and sanction irresponsible. For survival, therefore, one needs an individual ability to protect one’s own limits in the sense of responsibility toward the organization combined with responsibility toward oneself. In a situation when there is almost a limitless number of volunteer tasks, a deadly cocktail of team and personal tension can be mixed.

Second demand: Demand of time

With shared responsibility, it is very difficult to find the boundaries between personal and working time. From a certain point of view, whatever I do, I do “on mine and for myself”. It seems perfectly legitimate to spend time on it, to live it “to the fullest” and to sacrifice for a common cause one’s personal time, friends and interests outside of aforementioned context. In addition, shared decision-making requires a lot of time for meetings where all individual opinions are discussed and where decision-making on all matters related to the organization takes place.

Third demand: Demand of similar foundations

In a situation where we should decide together, there comes a series of tensions stemming from different at-

titudes and starting points, personal, ideological and even practical. This is best visible in debates over unpopular decisions: termination of employment in the organization, for example, due to the incompetence or personal incompatibility with others on the team, redistribution of tasks in a situation of general overload, payment of wages during the “financial drought” and so on. Similarly, the issue of decision-making should be mentioned in a situation where everyone making the decision has different insight into the subject matter, creating an unrealistic demand of a general basal overview of almost everything.

Fourth demand: Demand to understand the limits of non-hierarchy

In crisis situations, non-hierarchy is too cumbersome and slow, and crisis situations require fast and often vigorous solutions. At this time, informal authorities stand out clearly, they take the lead or are called to do so by the rest of the team. It is very important to recognize this situation and work with it skillfully. During these times, it is also good to distinguish when a crisis situation occurs and when it ends. By a crisis situation, in this context, I mean a situation where the functioning itself, the survival of the organization or its reputation are in danger, or where survival or the reputation of its workers are at stake.

Fifth demand: Demand to a limited number of people

As mentioned above, the more people, the longer the debates and the decision-making time. From a specific number of employees, discussions and decision-making processes become ineffective, aching so for everyone.

Sixth demand: Demand on communication skills and personal maturity

From the abovementioned, it is clear that non-hierarchy, in order to be effective, places great demands

on the participants’ ability to formulate their opinions, discuss them effectively, and respond to different opinions in a mature way. For these reasons, it appears crucial to have the opportunity of facilitation and supervision, which cultivate and raise the quality of communication, and also for the workers to have the personal maturity and be able to openly and honestly communicate not only their views but also the key emotions associated with them.

Seventh demand: Demand on relationship commitment

Non-hierarchy favors relationships at the workplace, people are logically closer in a horizontal rather than in a vertical structure. They spend a lot of time in joint meetings, and so the difference between the work and the personal worlds often disappears. What appears to be a repeated difficult situation for a member of a non-hierarchical organization is that he or she has a warm informal relationship with one of the colleagues and then he or she must participate in a decision with an unpleasant impact on the colleague. This is a great emotional load bearing predictable risk of harm to the mutual trust between them and at the same time, the loss of confidence in the organization itself.

Finally, I want to emphasize that if something is not working in a non-hierarchical organization, it is easy to blame the non-hierarchy for it. The reality is that working in a non-hierarchical organization places much bigger demands on workers than in a hierarchical organization. It can become a test of personal maturity, the ability to differentiate in a healthy manner what is my responsibility and what is not. The test of personal discipline, verification of my own limits and communication honesty.

Non-hierarchy is simply demanding, demanding in seven ways, and therefore demanding both personally and socially.

INSPIRATION FROM ELSEWHERE

NESEHNUTI is not the only organization with a non-hierarchical management style, other organizations also work on similar principles – from informal collectives to so-called free companies. We bring you several examples of non-hierarchical management outside of our organization.

TRI OCASCI (TRIOCASCI.CZ/EN)

Tri ocasci is a Brno cooperative fair cafe and pastry shop. In addition to brewing coffee and preparing vegan delicacies and sweets, Tri ocasci stands for human rights, they want an informed and self-confident civil society and they seek economic alternatives that serve people rather than money. Their functioning is based on the principle of a non-hierarchically managed social cooperative.

In 2017, the team is experiencing a transformation – earlier, more people were involved in management and they created a community rather than an employee collective. Now a tighter team of people decide, they have thematic meetings, for example on operational issues and on events. A narrower team is now trying to pull additional employees into the decision-making process. They perceive their biggest challenge to be that they are united at the common goal of functioning. Leadership in a non-hierarchy is desirable for them, but needs to be open to everyone. It is particularly important in crisis moments.

LIMITS ARE US (LIMITYJSMEY.CZ/EN)

An open civic movement against mining and burning of coal brings together individuals from various activist and non-activist groups throughout the Czech Republic. It was created from the bottom in 2015 in connection with the government's proposal to enlarge the boundaries ("limits") of brown coal mining in North Bohemia, which in its worst variant would mean the demolition of the villages of Horní Jiretín and Cernice.

Limits Are Us decides by consensus. The main venue for negotiation is the general assembly meeting, which meets as needed (sometimes once every two weeks, sometimes once in three months). The assembly delegates working groups to deal with individual tasks – these can be both long-term (law, communication, fundraising) and short-term only for a particular task. The so-called "process group" has an important function – it takes care of processes, prepares the assembly meeting, discusses the agenda with working groups and deals with other issues. The process group has four members and they regularly change.

AUTONOMOUS SOCIAL CENTER KLINIKA (KLINIKA.451.CZ/ENGLISH)

The Autonomous Social Center Klinika is a community, not-for-profit and self-governing project, which strives to critically oppose "normal" functioning in a capitalist society. Autonomous means that the operation and functioning of Klinika is decided by those who use and operate in it in a spirit of cooperation, sol-

idity and mutual assistance. Klinika was set up from the bottom at the end of 2014, it prevailed against the will of the authorities and is run from the bottom. The basis of the functioning is a general assembly, which is held every week, where members of the collective and those taking part in the functioning of Klinika meet. These general assemblies decide on everything essential, starting with the rules of operation and ending with the division of cleaning tasks. The general assemblies are an institution and at the same time a “school of direct democracy” for Klinika.

NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION

The international community of trainers in Nonviolent Communication associated in The Center for Nonviolent Communication (CNVC) uses some elements of sociocracy management (see Further Examples of Non-Hierarchical Management of Organizations on page 23). CNVC has a board of directors, which leads the organization and is responsible, for example, for finance or organization strategy, and then several teams (e.g. administrative or leadership) and circles (for example, the Global Community Circle, which is in charge of other circles).

Together with our colleagues from War Resisters' International and Campaign Against Arms Trade, we protested in 2015 against the IDET arms fair in Brno. Photo: Majda Slamova.



WE RECOMMEND READING

Sociocracy

Using majority vote to create autocracies.

Available online: www.sociocracy.info

Kees Boeke: Democracy as it might be (1945)

Available online:

www.worldteacher.faithweb.com/sociocracy.htm

Holacracy

Website dealing with holacratic management:

www.holacracy.org/

Decision making online platforms

Online Toolkits for participatory decision making:

www.loomio.org/#features

www.decidim.org

Consensus

Seeds for Change: They believe that in order to create real change we must meet to face injustice and build

alternatives. Seeds for Change exists to support groups that are trying to do so and who share their core values of equality, freedom and solidarity – for human beings, other animals and ecosystems.

www.seedsforchange.org.uk

Non-violent communication

www.cnvc.org

Non-Hierarchical Principles in Education: Free Schools

Available online: www.newschoolsnetwork.org

Do you want to know more about how we function and how to get started with a non-hierarchy? Write us at brno@nesehnuti.cz. We will be happy to meet you and share some knowledge!

NESEHNUTI

(Independent Socio-Ecological Movement)

We are a social-ecological non-governmental organization. The goal of our environmental and human rights activities is to show that social change based on respect for people, animals and nature is possible and must come primarily from the bottom. That is why we support committed people who are interested in what is happening around them and who regard responsibility for life on our planet as an integral part of their own freedom.

SUPPORT US

Do you like how we do it here? Support our unique experiment with a small donation to our transparent account IBAN: CZ5420100000002900087948 and stand with us NESEHNUTI (those who do not bow). Only together with you can we build a better society.

Thank you.

podporte.nesehnuti.cz

JOIN US

If you are sympathetic to our activities and you want to be actively involved, become a volunteer of NESEHNUTI!

NESEHNUTI

freedom – responsibility – engagement

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Five people in the management team were deciding about five hundred blockade participants without the hundreds of people having a possibility to take part in the decision-making process. People could only follow orders from the top. The absence of participation from the blockaders themselves was to blame for the fact that occasionally they performed absurd instructions from the management team. As a result, people were freezing for several days in the rain and “were blocking” a gate of the power plant that was not used and through which nobody wanted to pass. (...) Under these circumstances, we were setting up the NESEHNUTI statues in the evenings and devising our structure, actually a bit in opposition to the hierarchical, not fully democratic structures both in society and in civil movements. opposition to the hierarchical, not fully democratic structures both in society and in civil movements.

Milan Štefanec in an interview about the beginning of non-hierarchy in NESEHNUTI. (p. 7-12)