



Galgael: Self-governance with sociocracy

A case study of a social enterprise in Scotland

www.galgael.org

Galgael is a social enterprise in Scotland that prefers to call themselves a *working community*. They support skill development like boat-building, rural skills training, a retreat center for recovery from alcoholism and mental health, furniture-making and timber processing.

Galgael operates using sociocracy. Sociocracy is a governance method that

supports effectiveness and egalitarian governance – making decisions together as equals and still getting work done.

This case study explores the experiences Galgael made when using sociocracy as their decision-making method. My informant Gehan MacLeod is programme director and funding member of Galgael.



Why sociocracy for a social enterprise?

Legally, Galgael is a combination of a trust (non-profit) and a for-profit trading subsidiary which once established will support the work of the Trust.

To Gehan, sociocracy and social enterprises are a natural fit. *“A hierarchical organization can compromise on inclusiveness, and a charity can afford to be ineffective.” A social enterprise needs both, the effectiveness as a business and the inclusiveness and equivalence to be aligned with the social values and mission of the social enterprise.*

Sociocracy offers both the effectiveness without compromising on the value of hearing everyone.

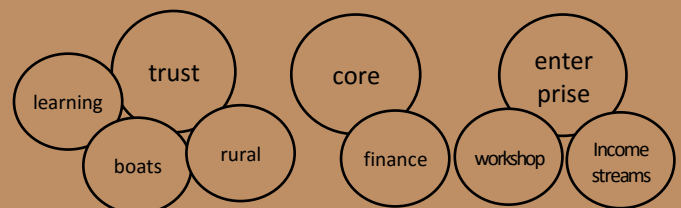
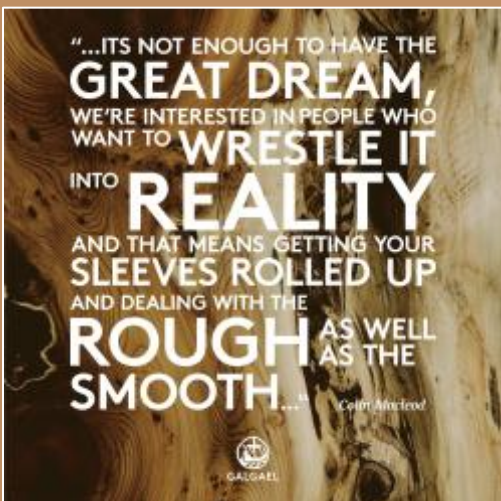
Overall experience

A staff member of Galgael did several trainings with sociocracy trainer John Buck in Scotland in 2013, and soon got training for all staff members and volunteers. They agreed to having an implementation group that would learn, practice and prepare an implementation of sociocracy for Galgael. Implementation was slow but steady, and they are continually progressing towards a fuller implementation.



The biggest gain from using sociocracy was in the internal communication and transparency in Galgael. In order for everyone to be equal in decision-making, everyone has to know how decisions are made and who makes those decisions. Gehan observed that when people make decisions together, they are more engaged in their shared efforts.

The organizational structure supports all parts of the organization but the pieces are not yet connected. (In sociocracy, one forms a general circle of two people from each “highest” work circle.)



Tools currently used:

- ❖ Sociocratic decision making (consent)
- ❖ Sociocratic meeting format
- ❖ Elections of facilitators

Next step:

Form a general circle with double linking (leaders and delegates from department circles)

Volunteers and staff

A challenge is that Galgael operates with both staff and volunteers. **Their governance structure needs to create a structure that works for staff but that offers spaces where volunteers can be heard and can contribute.** The mix of staff and volunteers has so far been addressed successfully, even though there is generally some turn-over among volunteers.

While re-working their own governance, Galgael also reviewed its aim. (Vision, mission and aims in sociocracy are the basis for decision-making.) That clarifying process made Galgael stronger; **now everyone is pulling in the same direction, and people are not wrestling with internal struggles anymore.**

Hearing everyone

Sociocracy is about hearing everyone, but also about getting things done. While the implementation group used sociocracy for their own governance, **the other teams soon became aware of sociocracy and the effectiveness it brings, and sociocracy started to radiate out into other teams.**

What would have helped in the implementation of sociocracy?

Galgael got continuing support from John Buck. What is still needed is a review of skills (facilitation skills etc.) so they can be practiced and reinforced to make decision-making smoother.

Gehan pointed out that just sociocracy is an investment in that everyone needs to be trained. Gehan compared learning sociocracy to learning to drive a car. It might be clunky in the beginning but after a while one can do it without thinking. She says that **while they were learning sociocratic processes, they had to pay attention to those processes, but they embraced that and started to see benefits soon. Now it is just what they do.**



By [Jennifer Rau](#)

Sociocracy For All is a social enterprise making sociocracy accessible to everyone. We offer training, resources and support for practitioners.

 Sociocracy For All
www.sociocracyforall.org