



Roles and elections in sociocracy

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1. Introduction

One of the richest processes in sociocracy is the selection process of people to leadership roles in a circle. It is also the process that diverges most from what we are used to doing. There are many reasons to love the sociocratic selection process:

- It has the potential to create a wonderful connecting experience for the group
- It has the potential to spread power and develop new leadership
- It is time efficient
- It is an opportunity to learn about each other in the circle

In order to run a circle successfully, we need some “overhead” of structure which involves roles (next to aims, domains etc.). If you are skeptical of too much structure and would rather “just do work together”, here is a conversation that happened in a sociocratic organization. A new subcircle had been formed. During the first meeting of the newly formed circle, it was time for elections. A circle member made a proposal to skip selections and get to work instead. A round was called to answer the question “Do we need process roles for this circle?”

| | | |
|---------|--------|---|
| EXAMPLE | Anja | I am just wondering, do we really need to spend time on elections now? I'd rather jump into content. |
| | Tina | Maybe just have a facilitator, that might be enough. Let's do a round on that. |
| | Audrey | I don't know. |
| | Raol | I do think a facilitator would be a good idea. I don't really want to be sitting in a meeting without any plan. |
| | Sarah | Hold on, I am not willing to be a part of this circle if we do not have roles. Let's look at the roles and remember why we need them. A facilitator is a no-brainer, without a facilitator we'll just have chaos and waste our time. Having a leader is great so one person pays attention. I don't want to make the same decision again and again because no one follows through. I want a secretary because I want the other people in the community to know what we're doing – what good is it to decide things if no one knows that's what's happening? What's left: a delegate. I want to make sure our mother circle knows what is going on, and that we are not only relying on one person. Tina is already part of that circle, and so is Audrey, so we might not have to add an extra commitment for anyone. |
| | Anja | Ok, that totally convinced me. |
| | Tina | I agree. And I also agree that a delegate is not necessary at this point as long as we're so well-connected with other circles. |
| | Audrey | No objections to doing elections. |
| | Raol | Thank you, Sarah, for reminding us so clearly that those roles are actually helping us do what we want to do. I think we should do selections now and just make sure to do them en bloc so we get it done. |
| | Sarah | Thanks. Do you want me to facilitate the selection process? (Consent round) |

This example shows not only that it makes sense to have content roles but also how easy it is even for members who are familiar and used to sociocratic governance to





forget WHY we do things the way we do things (in this example, the organization had been running for 4 years). Every group can benefit from a refresher from time to time.

There are only two roles that can't be filled by the same person: leader and delegate. This will make sense to you later in the program when we talk more about delegates and double-linking. For training purposes and to free attention, it makes sense to select different circle members into the different roles but you might have your own reasons to decide what works for you. Some roles are easier to fill at the same time than others. In theory, one can be facilitator and secretary all at once. In practice, it is hard to pay attention to facilitation and note-taking simultaneously. Therefore, we recommend that secretary and facilitator are filled by two separate individuals. Some combinations go well together, like secretary and logbook keeper. Roles in sociocracy are generally not about power but about **paying attention**. The leader is aware of the circle in its larger context (over time, in the organization). The delegate pays attention to what needs to be communicated to the next-broader circle. The secretary watches over the records of the circle and their circulation. Focusing on process during the circle meetings is the facilitator's role. A logbook keeper attends to policies and documents for the whole organization. That way, we can ensure that the circle members together make the most of their operational efforts and their precious meeting time.

2. Roles

Process roles are all the roles that help the circle run itself. Those roles are very similar to what many organizations are doing anyway, with some additional tasks that are sociocracy-specific. See an overview of all the roles in the diagram below.





a. Leader

i. What does a leader do?

The role of the Leader is to:

- oversee operations of the Circle
- communicate the interests and decisions of the Circle's broader Circle.

The leader makes time-sensitive operational decisions. Since decision-making on policy is done by consent, the leader operates within the frame of policy that the circle is giving.

Part of the operational leadership is to hold the processes and to pay attention to the whole of the circle. What needs doing next? Are circle members doing what they agreed to do? Who needs a check-in, and what might be needed so operations can run more smoothly? What comes from a broader circle that needs to happen here? (In the case of ELC – what comes from the coach that needs to be known/done in the ELC?)

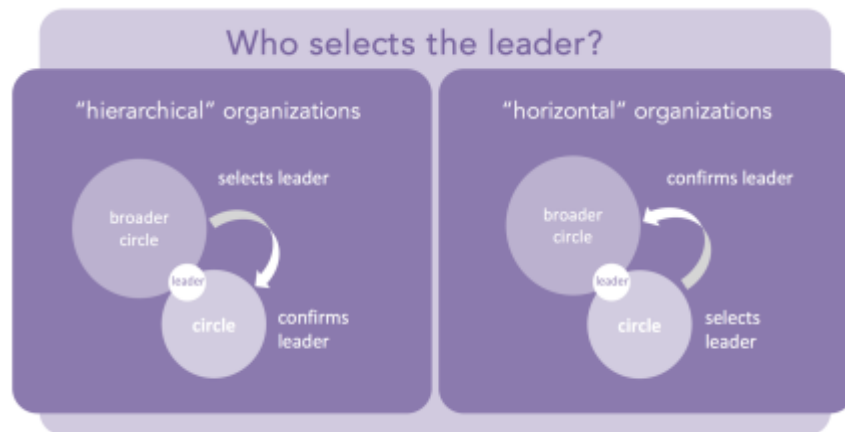
I like the image of a construction site: the building plan is the policy. The building activities are operations; every piece of sheet rock needs to be aligned with the building plan. The leader is aware of the policy and makes sure stuff gets done. Somebody has to pay attention to the whole.

As another example, imagine a membership circle. Any operation happens within the policy framework given by the membership circle. The operational activities of a membership circle might include outreach, orientations and ongoing education. The circle sets who is responsible for communication with people contacting the organization seeking information about membership and how that is handled. The leader makes sure this actually happens by checking in with people or doing whatever level of management is needed to make sure things happen smoothly.

ii. Who selects the leader?

Which circle selects the leader depends on the type of organization. In a hierarchical organization (like a business), the leader will be selected top-down. Traditionally, the leader is the top-down link while the delegate is the bottom-up link (see chapter 5 on double linking). In a more horizontal organization, the leader can be selected by the circle and then confirmed by the next-broader circle.





The two scenarios are shown in this diagram. Since roles and membership of a group are always based on consent (an individual consents to being part of a group, and a circle consents to any new member), neither of the two scenarios involves power-over.

Whenever an existing circle creates a new circle, the existing circle will usually select the leader for the new circle.

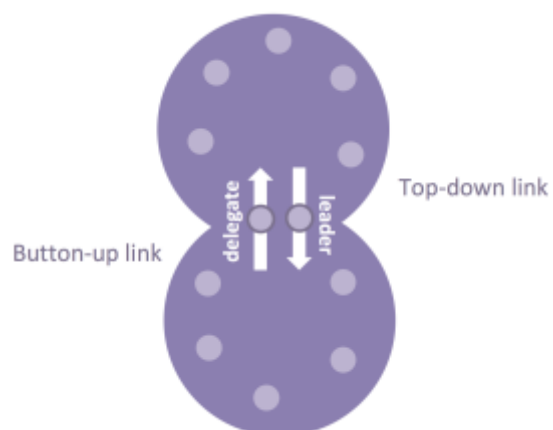
iii. The leader in your ELC

In your ELC, we assume that the leader is the one who made the circle happen and contacted SoFA. In a way, SoFA appoints the leader – you can choose to confirm your leader in a consent round but it is not part of the curriculum. We recommend going along with that for the sake of simplicity. If issues come up around the role of the leader, they can be addressed. This could be the case if the current leader drops out or fails to hold the group together.

b. Delegate

Each Circle selects a delegate to participate in the next broader circle. The delegate serves as the “bottom-up” link between circles, from more specific to more broad. The delegate participates as a full member in both circles. In order to have a double link, the delegate cannot be the same person as the Circle leader.

Hearing more than one voice from a circle in the broader circle supports the flow of information and transparency within an organization. A second voice is particularly useful when there is disagreement within a circle that needs to be





represented. (It is possible in some contexts to forgo double-linking if equal voice and transparency are ensured through other means.)

i. What does the delegate do?

The delegate attends the meetings of the next-broader circle. The delegate will report from their circle and make sure issues or concerns from their circle will be heard.

ii. The delegate in your ELC

In your ELC, you will select a delegate in the 4th session. (Yes, we realize this is late in the course. That's a learning issue -- in a training program, everything should happen in the beginning but that is just not possible. In an experienced group or for a real implementation, select a delegate when you fill all the other roles.) The delegate will take part in the check-ins with the coach to add another voice from your ELC.

c. Secretary

Each circle selects a secretary to take notes and to publish the minutes within the organization. In some organizations, the role of the secretary (also called the circle administrator) might also involve announcing circle meetings, preparing the agenda in consultation with other circle members, distributing study materials and proposals. The secretary also tracks what needs to be on meeting agendas, particularly remembering when a policy needs to be reviewed or that it is time for a new selection process for a role whose term of office is ending. As the keeper of the records, the secretary interprets policies when questions arise.

i. Why notes or minutes are so important in sociocracy

Since decisions in sociocracy are made in small, focused circles, it is vital for the circle and the organization that meeting records are not only written down but also distributed to the large group and remain accessible -- otherwise no one would hear about new policies that might affect them. It is just as vital to keep the minutes accessible. In larger organizations, logbook keeping (storing all policies in a central place and keeping them updated) can be done by another roles, the logbook keeper. In smaller organizations, this will typically be part of the secretary's role. Either way, it is important to define which tasks the secretary is expected to fulfil.

iv. The secretary in your ELC

In your ELC, the secretary will record decisions, write down questions and feedback, and make those notes accessible so they can be referred back to, passed on and addressed.

d. Facilitator

A facilitator is selected by each circle to run circle meetings. The facilitator will prepare the meeting agenda and guide the circle through all the steps of decision-making. The facilitator checks in with the leader to plan upcoming meetings.





i. Why is the leader not the facilitator?

The leader can be the facilitator if that works well for your circle. Since the skill set of a leader is very different from the skill set of a facilitator, sociocracy separates those two roles so that we are intentional about filling them. You might have someone in your circle who is good at both, but there are many examples of great leaders who do not enjoy facilitation and vice versa. The leader role typically asks for a person who is a doer, who is good at holding people accountable and paying attention to what needs to be done. A facilitator has to be comfortable in front of the group, paying attention to process and to listening and synthesizing. Obviously, these definitions are limited, but to put a slogan on it: the leader has to be competent managing the content level of the circle, while the facilitator has to be competent on the process level. We have seen many examples of great leaders who do not enjoy facilitation. Also, it makes sense that the leader has free attention to attend to content during the meeting while the facilitator holds the process level.

Groups often ask whether they could just “share” the facilitation. The answer is, yes facilitation can be rotated among members under two conditions. (1) Only one person is facilitator per meeting (unless there is a good reason to fill in, for instance if the facilitator is strongly attached to an outcome or triggered by a situation). (2) If facilitation rotates over meetings, it must be clear who is responsible for the preparation of the agenda - does that rotate as well, or does only the actual facilitation rotate? Preparing the meeting agenda is an important part of effective decision-making. While preparing the agenda, the facilitator -- ideally with the circle leader and the secretary -- thinks about next steps for each agenda items: are we doing picture forming, is there a proposal ready, is everyone present at the meeting who we want there to gather feedback or make a decision? Just putting an item on the agenda is no guarantee of an effective meeting. Being clear what is realistic and desired as a next step can boost the circle’s productiveness and will be highly appreciated. The group can still spread the facilitation skills by having short terms for the facilitator, like setting short terms and have a selection process every four or five meetings so someone else gets the opportunity to practice. That way, it is still clear who is responsible for making the agenda and facilitating the meeting.

ii. The facilitator in your ELC

For your ELC, we recommend that you choose a facilitator who is not your leader. Seek a facilitator that you trust will be able to guide you through the meetings. A lot of the ELC meeting facilitation is prepared in video content so the responsibility of the facilitator is reduced compared to a completely self-guided circle.





3. Selection processes

a. Introduction

The election process in sociocracy is one of the most magical processes I am aware of. We often call elections selections but it describes more precisely what we do: we select someone amongst us to fill a role.

Elections in sociocracy are very different from secret ballot majority vote. Even though we consider the right to secret ballot a foundation of democracy, transparency held with care brings elections to a new level. In general, an election is just a normal proposal, just that the proposal sounds like “XYZ be facilitator”, or whatever role you are selecting for.

The structure of a selection process is like the one of proposal shaping and consenting to any other proposal. Together we come up with a proposal. This is not an individual process but a group process where we learn from one another and influence each other. Once the proposal is ready, we seek consent. In cases where there are objections, we deal with the objections until everyone can consent to the proposal.

What makes sociocratic elections so different from other ways of elections is that they are open and transparent. The sociocratic election process rests on the principles of sociocracy, in that transparency and feedback enable us to learn. Elections are a wonderful opportunity for more learning and more connection in any group.

We do acknowledge that since the sociocratic way of elections is so different from what we are used to, some people have a hard time with it. We will address the challenges further below and show what we think lies underneath those challenges.

b. Steps in a sociocratic election

This graphic shows the different steps of a sociocratic selection. A selection process begins with the facilitator announcing that elections are happening and for what role.





i. Define role

In a new context, the group will then define that role or review the definition of that role. This is necessary for instance if it is a content role, or if the group is new to sociocracy. If an established group selects an established role like the process roles with no changes, this step is not necessary. It has proven helpful to paraphrase the role in one sentence, however, because you might have people in your circle who are new, or you might have small differences even between circles within the same organization in



what tasks are involved. Does the facilitator prepare the agenda with the secretary and the leader, or is there a different agreement? Does the secretary keep the member roster current in case of elections? If you are selecting a delegate, how often does the next-broader circle meet, and/or there an established meeting times/dates? All this might inform the selection process. The facilitator can ask the circle member currently filling that role to give a 3 sentence overview over the role, like in this example: "We're filling the role of the facilitator today. In this circle, traditionally the facilitator facilitates the meetings, and sends out a meeting reminder and announces the agenda." Not everyone in the circle might be aware of who does what and reviewing it increases transparency and learning about your own organization, learning and reviewing along the way is the best strategy even for experienced organizations.

v. Define the term

The next step is to define the term. Oftentimes, in non-sociocratic elections, the term is pre-set. In sociocracy, we set the term intentionally. Why? Because we strive for intentionality in order to adapt to any situation. We will typically have a default, like one year terms. What could be reasons to shorten the term or to make it longer than that?

- To develop leadership by giving more people the opportunity to fill a role. This could be true for an organization that is new to sociocracy and has many people trained, and we want to give everyone a chance to practice their facilitation skills, for instance.
- An organization might extend a term if they don't feel the need for much change, or they want to calm things down in times of transition. For instance, when there are many other changes, having an experienced facilitator for a long time might give people confidence and comfort.

Of course there is no harm in selecting someone and re-selecting the same person. When selections are open, transparent and by consent, there is no need for the protection that term limits offer in majority voting. The key phrase here is intentionality





and clarity. If you do not select a term, then the proposal is underspecified and unclear. Define a default, and at the very least refer to the default in an explicit way. “We’re selecting a facilitator for this circle, and I propose the term is our default term of one year.”

vi. Define qualifications

In this step, the circle will gather qualifications that they think are needed to fill this role. (Again, this is a step that will be skipped or reduced to one sentence in established groups and for established roles.)



You can do rounds with every circle member adding qualifications to the list. What qualities do you think a person filling this role should have? Below are generic examples of what groups have come up with but be sure to make your own list of qualifications, specifically for your context. The idea of this step is not only to have those lists for future reference but also to, as a group, focus on what is important for the upcoming election in your group, as these lists will inform your nomination(s). No one person is likely to meet all the desired qualifications perfectly, but you will nominate someone for the role based on these qualifications and not on their popularity or their ability to “buy” votes.

There could be qualifications more specific to your situation, like

- “A facilitator for this circle should have completed the facilitation training”, or
- “The leader for this finance circle should have some accounting experience”, or
- “This time I think we’re ready for someone with only little experience, so experience is not so important this time”

You now know what role you are selecting for, how long the term is suggested to be, and what kind of candidate you are looking for. The role description, term of office and qualifications to consider, by the way, are all policies decided by consent. Your selection proposal is almost complete. The only piece missing is who you would like to propose to





fill that role. Make sure to keep your list of qualifications visible to all in the next step so it can inform people's thinking.

vii. Write down nomination

As a next step, everyone in the circle will now nominate someone for that role. The way this is done in sociocracy is that everyone writes down their own nomination on a little sheet of paper. We offer templates for nominations in the handout to ELC, but really, the piece of paper can be empty. The only thing it needs to say is "I, (your name), nominate (name of who you nominate)". In case you filling more than one role at once, indicate what roles you are nominating for.

viii. Share nomination in round

In a round, everyone in the group shares who they nominated and why. This can be a one-sentence statement, or a slightly longer one, depending on the context. One very important detail is that you can nominate yourself! That does not equate volunteering for the job since you need consent from the other circle members to be selected. But if you have good reasons to believe that you are well-qualified for the role, go for it. Your desire to do so is useful information for the circle.

Here are some examples of how what a nomination will sound like if you are selecting a facilitator:

- Sarah: I nominated Yuong because I have seen him facilitate in other circles. He is clear and concise and often explains why we do what, and I enjoy that.
- Peter: nominated Sarah because she is clear, experienced, quick to understand, and she understands process, and those are the qualifications that most people in the group named for a facilitator.
- Victor: I nominated myself because I am looking for some more practice in facilitation after taking the webinar on facilitation, and I think I know enough to do a good job.
- Yuong: I nominated Victor because I want to give him a chance to practice. I have seen that he has worked to widen his skills, and I want to honor that.

Why do we write our nominations down? The sociocratic nomination process supports broadening your perspective at the beginning of the process. Who would you like to see in that role? Is there information that only you have that is worth sharing? Is there a special angle that informs your perspective? We want to hear everyone's reasoning without losing information. During the nomination round, it is incredibly tempting to just go with the group energy, especially when you are speaking late in the round. Writing down your nomination will encourage you to share your genuine nomination without getting swayed to soon (or not at all). So often, the best ideas are the ones that seem peripheral at first.





It helps if the facilitator writes down the nominations for themselves, in a grid like this:

nominates

| | |
|--------|--------|
| Sarah | Yuong |
| Peter | Sarah |
| Victor | Victor |
| Yuong | Victor |

ix. Change round

Now everyone has heard the other people's ideas and reasons. If you have ever been part of a sociocratic election, you might agree that so many times, other people seem to have the better ideas. This does not mean that you submit to the group will. You do not have to change your mind. The whole group just got a lot of information in the sharing of other people's reasons. Maybe the information was new, maybe just refreshed and raised in your awareness. In this example, maybe not everybody knew or remembered that Victor had taken a facilitation class. Maybe others have not seen Yuong facilitate yet. Thanks to the nomination round and people sharing their reasons, everyone in the group now knows more than before, and that already is an advantage of this process, not even considering the outcome of an election.

In the change round, every circle member will say who they nominate now, and they share reasons for their change if that applies.

- Sarah: I am staying with my nomination for Yuong because of what I said earlier. I think he is a good facilitator.
- Peter: I am changing my nomination to Victor because I had forgotten that he had taken that class, and I appreciate when people learn more, so I want to give him the opportunity to practice.
- Victor: I am staying with my self-nomination for the reasons stated.
- Yuong: I nominated Victor and I am staying with that. I think it is important to give people experience so we all get better at what we do here.





The facilitator of this selection process now sees this grid (either written or on his/her mind):

| | nominates | Change round |
|--------|-----------|--------------|
| Sarah | Yuong | Yuong |
| Peter | Sarah | Victor |
| Victor | Victor | Victor |
| Yuong | Victor | Victor |

x. Facilitator proposes a candidate

The facilitator will propose a candidate. (By the way, the facilitator can ask someone else in the circle to propose a candidate). In some contexts, many members could fill a role well enough for the needs of the circle. In other contexts, the choice of a particular person to fill a role may be more critical. In this example, the facilitator might propose Victor as a facilitator even though Victor is not the most skilled facilitator in the group.

xi. Consent round

- The facilitator presents the proposal and say they are making that proposal. “I propose that Victor be facilitator in this circle, because this would give him experience and he is eager to learn, for a term of one year.” The facilitator then calls for a consent round. Consent means that no one has an objection. You might find yourself in a position where you are asked to consent or object to someone who is not your preference. Remind yourself that in the nomination round, you are being asked about your preference. In the consent round, you’re asked about your range of tolerance. Only object if you see your participation or the circle’s success impacted by that candidate filling that role. Does, for instance, selecting Victor as a facilitator potentially harm the circle’s work/learning? If so, then object. If not, then consent (on the emotional challenge of objecting to someone, see below).

If there are objections, do not give up right away, for instance by nominating a different candidate. First check and see if there is a way to turn the no into a yes. For instance, someone might have an objection because the candidate does not have enough experience, and they think experience is an essential qualification in your circle’s situation (the list of qualifications comes in handy here). In that case, figure out if you could get the candidate some extra training, for instance a webinar on facilitation. (We happen to have a webinar recording [here](#).) Another way to address an objection is to shorten the time frame; if one circle member is not convinced that Victor is a good candidate to be facilitator, would the objector be willing to try Victor for 3 sessions and





schedule an evaluation then? What can we do to move forward on this decision? Remember to go in rounds – tap into group wisdom and be gentle with each other, and you will find a good solution.

In the consent round, we always start the consent round in a way so that the nominee goes last. By that time the nominee will have heard all the other circle members consent or object. In sociocracy, we want people to step up into power, and sometimes the confidence and faith of a group gives people what it takes to consent to being selected. If the nominee themselves objects, for instance for lack of experience, remind them that the whole group had confidence in them, and ask what they would need to be able to say yes. Don't push too hard. If there does not seem to be a way forward, the facilitator can nominate someone else. Since the other nominations are still on people's minds, you don't have to go through the whole process – just make another nomination proposal and go into a consent round.

If there are no (more) objections, the facilitator will announce the decision. You're done!

c. Frequently asked questions about sociocratic elections

i. Can we select for more than one role at a time?

Yes. This makes sense if your choices seem interdependent, like you want someone as a facilitator but only if he or she is not delegating, or any kind of combination that makes sense in your group and situation.

So how does that work? In the nomination round, people would then say all their nominations. "I nominate XZY for ... because..., and NN for delegating because..." and so on. For 2 roles, the grid then looks like this. You can select all roles at the same time.

| nominations | Change round | | | |
|-------------|--------------|------------|------------|------------|
| | For role 1 | For role 2 | For role 1 | For role 2 |
| Sarah | Yuong | Peter | Yuong | Peter |
| Peter | Sarah | Yuong | Victor | Yuong |
| Victor | Victor | Sarah | Victor | Yuong |
| Yuong | Victor | Peter | Victor | Peter |

The facilitator might now propose Victor for role 1 and Yuong for role 2, or any other choice that makes sense. It makes sense to combine the proposal ("I propose Victor for role 1 and Yuong for role 2 for the following reasons"). If one of the roles is not as easy to fill, it may make sense to consent to the straightforward one(s) to get that out of the way and then to focus on the election that needs more attention.





xii. Why don't we just let people volunteer?

Whenever we teach this process, there is someone in the group that asks “Why did we never ask whether that person wants to do that role?” How can we talk about them serving in a role if we don't know whether they are available and willing?

The short answer is: we don't have to. They are part of the process and the decision is made by consent. They cannot be forced into a role. So there is no harm in this process but instead a lot of advantages. Asking for willingness at the beginning of the process would reduce our options and would change the energy during the process. We encourage facilitators to remind the group before every election to abstain from making assumptions about people's willingness or availability.

It makes quite an impression to hear other people talk about how qualified you are for a role. Everyone who has seen several sociocratic elections will agree that it is not unheard of that the individual selected says afterwards: “I would have never volunteered for this role, but I was really convinced by all the positive feedback I heard here. I feel honored to fill this role.”

Remember that this is why it is best to start the consent round so that the candidate speaks last. To achieve that, just start the round with the person next to the candidate and pass the round in the opposite direction. That way, the nominated person will get to hear everyone else first. Sociocracy is about shared power, and one way to bring that value to life is to encourage people to take on responsibility.

Another reason to hold elections instead of volunteering is that the basis for the decision of who fills the role is qualification, not willingness. A volunteer might not be the fit person for the job. And the best candidate might not volunteer, so filling roles on a volunteer basis will not get us reliably good results. There is an emotional component to being picked that we are commenting on below.

xiii. Can there be objections in a selection process?

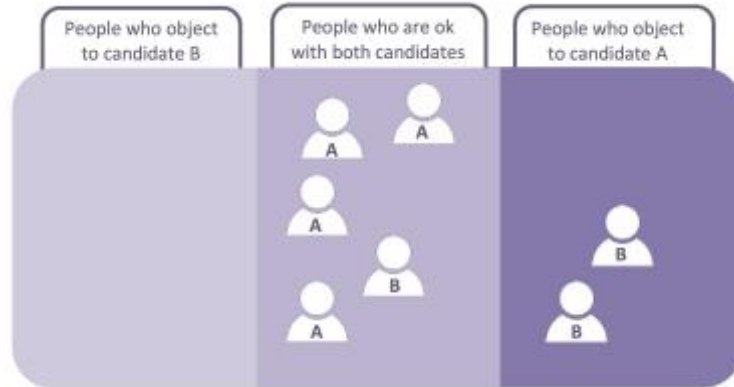
Yes. We have already talked about that. There can be objections to any proposal, and selection proposals are no exception. We cannot predict what kind of objections might come up in your group, but typical reasons to object to a selection proposal are: lack of experience, lack of skill and lack of time/attention. However, as with any other proposal and objection, the process does not end here. A group comes to a decision because there have been good reasons for that proposal. Imagine you have a group where one person is by far the most qualified for the leader. But she is overloaded with other jobs and might actually object to the proposal herself. Then it is everyone's responsibility to deal with the objection - could someone help her fill the role? Could she just try it for 3 months and then revisit? Could she try for three months with the condition that she teaches two other people how to take on other jobs of hers? Could she drop other roles or tasks? How could we measure that our candidate filling the role works well? Do we do a performance review earlier than usual for the proposal to be safe? Amend the proposal or change the term, until everyone in the circle (and that includes the candidate) can consent to the proposal.





xiv. Why not vote?

If we elect an individual into a role by majority vote, then the person with the most votes wins. In general, the issue with majority vote is that in its outcome, up to 49% of the votes are being ignored. Look at the following example.



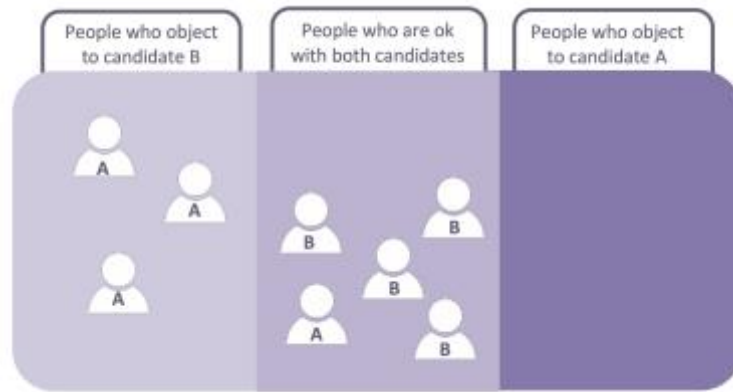
In this example, “A” and “B” indicate the individuals’ preferences. This is also what they would vote in an election. For majority vote, we would count 4 votes for candidate A, and 3 people for candidate B. In consent, the facilitator might propose candidate A but this vote will not get consent because two people will object. So what looks like a fair vote, ignores objections that people have. If the facilitator proposes candidate B, there will be consent. This scenario shows the difference between consent and majority rule. Majority rule runs the risk of ignoring valuable information in the form of objections while consent pays attention to objections. Sociocracy here focuses on effectiveness – enabling the circle to move forward and make the best decisions based on feedback and amendments over time rather than getting stuck trying to make a perfect decision now.

xv. What if there is a “tie”?

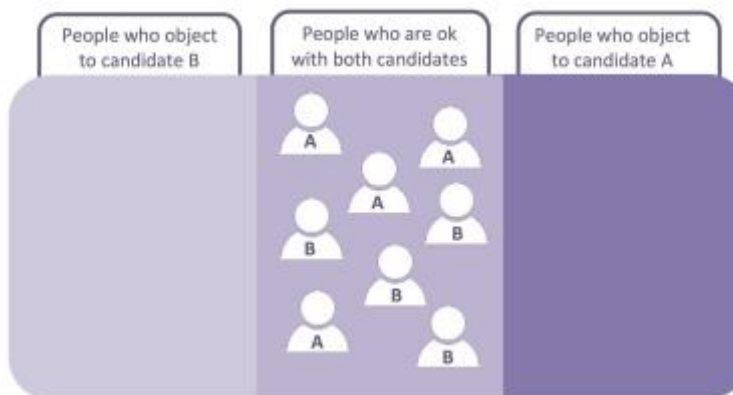
Imagine you have a group of 8 people, and exactly 4 people nominate candidate A, and 4 people nominate candidate B. In majority vote, this would be a tie. You are the facilitator (and you nominated one of those people) – what do you do?

For consent decision-making, you have to know a little more. What is the underlying story? Do we have objections on any side like in scenario 1 below, or do we really have consent for both candidates like in scenario 2?





Scenario 1



Scenario 2

In scenario 1, proposing candidate A will get us consent but proposing candidate B will bring objections. In scenario 2, you can go either way. Before we go into what to do then, let me point out that if you know the group well, you probably know where people are at. If you don't, for instance because it is a new group, you don't necessarily have to find out before you make a proposal, as you will find out when you ask for consent. (There is much more to say about this topic – we will leave it at that for this level.)

The facilitator's task is to get the group to come to a decision that everyone can work with. If that is true for both candidates, great. You can also say that. "I am guessing that both candidates could get consent from the group which shows how much skill and trust we have in this group." Then make a decision, and be specific in your reasoning. Go back to the qualifications and how you would prioritize them. For instance, did we say we wanted to select someone who does not have a lot of experience yet? Then go with the least experienced candidate. Or is there another qualification that makes the difference for you? Always remember: you are looking to find a candidate that everyone can consent to. Your task is *not* to find the best candidate.





d. Emotional challenges

i. Hurting someone's feelings.

The nominee is not your preference. Or you actually object because XYZ's facilitation style does not work for you. You might feel torn - speak up at the costs of hurting feelings or consent at the cost of not being authentic. As a first step, try to detach from your personal preference. We easily forget, but the question is not "do I *want* this circle member to fill the role?" The question is, if this person fills the role, does that affect you negatively in doing your job? If the answer is yes, then you have to object. But how do you object to a person, maybe even a friend? This is hard, and we can only give you some pointers – doing it will still be uncomfortable. The first thought to keep in mind is that you are not objecting to a person. You are objecting to a person filling a role. You can love a person dearly but their competence in leading, facilitation or writing minutes just does not work for you. In order to give useful feedback or to object, you will have to be more specific. What could that person do differently so it would work for you? Let me tell a personal story here. A friend of mine was nominated for facilitator. I was not happy. I did not want her to be facilitator. I was sitting with the judgement of "whenever she facilitates, we never get anything done. Her style is too loose, and we'll just round and round circle without outcome". I was judging, not seeing what my own needs are. That lack of clarity kept me from giving constructive feedback. If you are clear about what you need, you can give very clear input that is easy to hear. In this scenario, it could sound like this: "You all know about me that I really value effective meetings. I get impatient when things are not moving, and I realize I get more impatient more easily than most of you. I am concerned that it will be hard for me to sit through meetings. Can we make a deal? I am fine with XYZ facilitating if I can voice when things are moving too slowly for me and be sure I am heard and considered." Now consider a round where people assure me they will hear me when I get impatient. I did not object to XYZ, instead our circle just grew in mutual understanding. Of course, if I don't trust that the circle will support me, or if XYZ's facilitation style really affects my work or the work of the circle, I will have to address it differently. The important pointer in this story is: own your own stuff first. There is a huge difference between those two statements: "Your facilitation is muddy and ineffective" vs. "I just need facilitation to be clear and crisp so I don't lose track of what we're doing, that just makes it easier for me to be productive in meetings." If you want, add a doable request and play the ball into the circle's field. Another way to look at it is that feedback may trigger another person's hurt feeling but the feedback is not the cause. The cause of the pain is the receiver's interpretation. Feedback, when delivered with care, is a gift.

ii. "What about me?"

In the nomination process, it is hard for some if they are not nominated although, quietly, they consider themselves right for the job. There is a lot to be said about this, but one short answer is: nominate yourself. Another answer is that the selection process is not about nominating everyone who would be appropriate for the job. In an experienced group, everyone might be "good enough" to be facilitator. Nominations do not have to cover every potential candidate in the room even if it can feel like they





should. Also, remind yourself that selections are not a popularity contest. Even if you are not considered a great facilitator/leader/... you will still have a valuable role in the circle. (In a safe group, we strongly encourage making yourself vulnerable. “This selection process was hard for me. I wanted my name to be among the nominations, and I wanted to be needed and considered. I understand that this is not about popularity but I do want to just let you know that this was hard.” You could even ask for a quick round of people telling you what you bring to the circle or ask for suggestions about how you could improve your skills so that people would feel confident proposing you for that role in the future. That’s a matter of 5-10 minutes of meeting time. Why would it be worth spending those 5 minutes? Because it creates a sense of connection, trust and respect in the circle which is the basis for your collaboration. If you wanted to do a community-building exercise to build trust, you’d be very willing to spend the time on that - so why not go with a real moment? If all circle members would learn over time that they can be human in their collaboration as walk the talk, you would make an immense contribution to your organization.

iii. Facilitator bias

Another challenge is if the facilitator is very attached to a particular outcome (that is not only true for elections). In that case, the facilitator can own their own bias and can ask someone else to facilitate that part of the meeting. Anyone who owns being biased will earn a lot of trust from any group. “I realize that now that I/my dear friend/... is being nominated so often here, that I don’t feel confident that I can do a good or neutral job here, and I don’t want offer reasons to think I am proposing someone for my advantage. Could someone else facilitate this election?” (Or: “Could someone else make a selection proposal?”, or “Could we do a quick round on whether you think this is too close to home for me?”) In the long run, this will have a healing and connecting effect on any group.

If a facilitator repeatedly makes proposals that are uncomfortable for the circle, that feedback should be shared in the meeting evaluation or a separate performance/role improvement review.

iv. Feelings will come up, no matter what

Talking about the challenges of a sociocratic selection process, we can easily forget that majority vote comes with emotional challenges as well. However, we are so used to considering voting “fair” that we do not acknowledge that. Just imagine what it feels like to get only 1 vote while there is a head to head race between two candidates who both got more than 6 votes. Or no votes for you. Sociocracy does not magically make everything comfortable and easy, and it cannot make emotional triggers disappear. What the Sociocratic process can do, however, is give space to talk about one’s feelings and interpretations. To us, this is part of the package but it is very implicit in sociocracy. For instance, sociocracy offers space in form of a reaction round. You are given “air time” to voice your vulnerability. You still have to do it, the decision-making process does not do it for you. What we notice is that groups can grow, and that courage typically gets appreciated. We always teach sociocracy with a non-violent communication (NVC)





framework as a backdrop (for more information, check out cnvc.org or www.newenglandnvc.org). If the emotional challenges around any governance decision are hard for your group, we strongly recommend educating your group for communication skills.

In general, we encourage groups to accept and acknowledge that feelings come up when we make decisions together. Better to be open about it than to pretend they are not there.

Jennifer Rau, for SoFA

Learn more about sociocracy on our youtube channel ([click](#))
and on our website ([click](#)) .

