

INTERVIEW WITH DENNIS WITTRICK ABOUT HOLACRACY™

For the *first time in Spain*, the concept and practice of Holacracy™ is going to be introduced in the form of a workshop that will take place in the month of May in Madrid (5th and 6th). Raquel Torrent, the organizer of the venue and translator, held this interview to prepare the field for the attendees. She introduces the guest teacher and certified Holacracy™ practitioner, *Dennis Wittrock*. He is a well known man in the Integral world, above all in Germany, for being one of the most outstanding people of the German Integral Community and for having been a keynote speaker in the last Integral Conference of the AIE in Madrid, October 2011.

Raquel

Hello Dennis, please tell us in short and easy words: what is Holacracy™ and why should one practice it?

Dennis

This is always the biggest challenge – to sum it up in a few words! Holacracy™ is a practice for the organization. It is often described as a kind of new operating system. An operating system on your computer (Windows, Linux, OS-X) is the fundamental basis for all the other applications you run with it. It enables but also limits everything else. Our current organizational operating systems are hopelessly outdated in our fast-paced world. They are relicts of the industrial age. Yet today, there is so much change, acceleration and complexity modern organizations have to deal with in this post-modern information age. If they fail to do so it leads to frustrations and waste of energy, resources and motivation. Holacracy™ offers a major upgrade for our organizational system based on the principles of Dynamic Steering.

It gives every person in the organization the ability to process his or her frustration and to channel it into meaningful change for the organization. This leads to a continual evolution and re-wiring of the DNA of the organization. The processes of Holacracy™ allows everybody to have a voice in the governance of the organization - without falling prey to “the tyranny of consensus”. This is achieved by applying a novel process called Integrative Decision-Making™.

Holacracy™ offers a nuanced way of running several kinds of meetings – with formats for operational, governance and strategic meetings. This helps to disentangle organizational issues from multiple levels and dramatically increases the effectiveness and speed of meetings. You don't have to solve all kind problems in one type of meeting! Truly a blessing! There are plenty of reasons to practice Holacracy™, it very

much depends on where you are coming from. But I haven't met a person yet who hasn't found some kind of value in it.

Raquel

Is this a new tool for everyone or just for the business world?

Dennis

Holacracy™ works in *for-profit* as well as *non-profit* contexts. In fact, from the organizational lens that Holacracy™ applies, it is not so interesting whether your organization is a business or a non-profit organization. Both types of organization have a purpose in the world. Brian Robertson, one of the pioneers of this method once said that profit is a good *metric* but not a proper *purpose* for an organization. Is an organization producing more value than it consumes? The profit metric can give clarity on that.

Money is to an organization what oxygen is to the body. If you run out of it obviously the whole cannot function properly and fulfill its purpose. But if profit or money is imagined as the sole purpose of the organization this is an indication that the organization itself is a slave to human ego. It is not free to express its own unique *purpose* in the world – which is not necessarily what the board *thinks* it should be. Its purpose has to be sensed and discovered continually.

Holacracy™ views the organization as an entity *separate* from the people. It has a life of its own. People join it for a while to energize organizational roles and express their own self in purpose of something bigger. But if they get replaced this entity called organization lives on without them. Sometimes people only join because they get paid and this is sufficient for them to motivate them to fill their organizational role. But most people seem to want more, especially today. They long for meaning and purpose and to contribute to something larger than themselves. This is a need for meaning and self-transcendence that serves as the main fuel for non-profit organizations where a lot of unpaid voluntary work is done. Holacracy™ certainly offers this, too. Yet, still, from the perspective of the organization it doesn't matter so much whether people join because of internal or external motivations, money or vision.

Holacracy™ is attractive for non-profit organizations because they often suffer from a lack of clarity around the distribution of authority, problems with hierarchy and decision-making that often leads to “the tyranny of consensus” and long and unproductive meetings, especially in the postmodern cultural context. It offers a way to integrate perspectives without becoming fuzzy and protects the organization from all kinds of personal drama and petty ego agendas.

Raquel

Could you tell us a little bit about the history of Holacracy™? Where, How, Who?

Dennis

The practice was pioneered a few years ago where Brian Robertson and his colleagues were involved in a software company. They said to themselves “There must be a better way to live and work together. What would it look like?” So they embarked on an adventurous journey to find out. Their company became their laboratory. They tried hundreds of methods, models and practices and Brian often jokingly says that they “found a thousand ways *not* to do it”. But the result of continually erring fast into the right direction was this distilled practice they called “Holacracy™”. The company became pretty successful and won several awards for fast growth, sustainability, as well as the “Spirit at Work” Award.

Holacracy™ has various theoretical and practical sources, among them the practice of Sociocracy, Agile Software Development principles, Linda Berens Type Models, the GTD method by David Allen and of course the AQAL framework by Ken Wilber. The name “Holacracy” is derived of the root word “Holarchy” (a hierarchy of nested Holons: whole/parts) and the suffix “- cracy” as in “Demo-cracy” or “Auto-cracy”, meaning “the reign of” from the greek word “kratein”. Literally “Holacracy” means “the reign of the organizational holarchy”.

Currently Brian Robertson runs *HolacracyOne*, a consulting firm with the purpose of bringing “Exquisite Organization” to the world by delivering Holacracy™ consulting and licensing services, workshops (like the upcoming one in Madrid), etc. to companies, coaches and other interested individuals.

Raquel

What it was what appealed to you personally about Holacracy™? Why did you fall in love with it as to become a certified teacher?

Dennis

I met Brian Robertson back in 2006 at *Integral Institute (I-I)* of Ken Wilber where I was volunteering. He gave a presentation on Holacracy™ at the staff meeting at the I-I office and I was lucky enough to be able to witness it. I was immediately blown away by the power and the ingenuity of the practice. It made so much more sense than all the rest I’ve heard or seen by then. It struck me as the missing puzzle piece for the expression of integral consciousness in the exterior–collective domain (or “LR quadrant” for those who speak integral slang...). I later found out that it is much, much more than that, but this is where it landed for me. Here was a practice that was honoring peoples’ perspectives from all levels or personality types. Wow.

And: it was not yet merely another *theory* about reality but actually something tested and tried-out to *work* with in the *real* world – even in the business world. The business world holds an enormous share of power in the world. Here I had discovered something that was able to outperform conventional approaches by far and to entirely transform the way we show up at work. Wow.

Another source of fascination for me is the grand futuristic vision of an organic holarchic network of self-organized yet connected organizations - a global fractal of immense power and beauty that could gradually replace and make obsolete politics and national governments as we know it. Again: wow. I was completely in love!

So I invited Brian to come and speak at our German integral conference of *Integrales Forum* in 2007. I organized his first tour in Europe and since that time we do regular workshops in Germany. Now I am very happy to be a Holacracy™ ambassador for Spain as well! Thank you again for your invitation and for holding the space to pioneer something new here.

Raquel

Could we say that Holacracy™ uses an integral framework? What is the relationship between Holacracy™ and the Integral Vision?

Dennis

Holacracy™ clearly stems from a level of consciousness that is integral or above. There are several indications for this who will make sense for everybody who is familiar with the integral theory by philosopher Ken Wilber. I will list a few here:

- systematic integration of perspectives via Integrative Decision Making™ (IDM)
- evolutionary holarchic structure (recognizes natural holarchies)
- natural systems design: listening to reality for requisite structures
- cultivation of transpersonal states beyond the ego for the collective
- creates a non-threatening, collective witnessing space for reflection on individual Ego, observing and releasing its patterns for the sake of the whole
- the process integrates typological preferences and abilities
- the process integrates stage-related preferences, values and abilities
- reduction of fear as a second-tier marker: Holacracy™ creates conditions and contexts that make great amounts of fear no longer useful

- it transcends and includes previous decision-making systems (IDM as the new threshold for the other styles and processes)
- it exhibits true YELLOW Meme FLEX-FLOW properties via dynamic steering
- The underlying Dynamic Steering paradigm is a way for the organization to continuously wake up from the illusions of the old predict-and-control paradigm - not unlike awareness-practices like meditation for the individual
- potential future TURQUOISE style meta-meshworking between organizations becomes a concrete possibility
- a second-tier technology or artifact (if not 3rd tier) for the LR that can be used by people from all walks of life (implicit complexity, doesn't require people to be "up there" to apply it, like PCs, Smartphones, etc.) In my view it just starts in the LR and transforms all the other quadrants along the way...
- integral models are an explicit part of Holacracy's language and culture to create high-bandwidth communication

Raquel

If someone still does not have very clear what Holacracy™ is or wants to give it a try before subscribing for the seminar on the 5th and 6th of May?, what can they do?

Dennis

For sure there is so much more to explore here. The notion that one actually clearly *knows* Holacracy™ is a bit confusing. It is a *practice* and like any real practice there are infinite nuances and no end in learning about and mastering it. If people want to dive deeper, they can go and check out the material and resources available on www.holacracy.org, or take part in one of their free webinars to get a better taste of this. And join us for the workshop in May, of course!

Raquel

Thanks a lot for your time, Dennis, it sounds very appealing and we look forward to listen to your explanations and experience the simulation of Holacracy™ meetings live and from the first-person perspective. And thank you very much for wanting to bring it to Spain.

-March 6th, 2012

Information about the Workshop (May 5th - 6th, 2012, Madrid):

<http://www.holacracy.org/events/introduction-to-holacracy-with-integral-theory-spain>