



## **Sociocracy in “Learn To Change”**

Case study by Maud Cornet as her contribution to the [Sociocracy Leadership Training \(SoLT\)](#) by [Sociocracy For All](#).

### **What is “Learn To Change”?**

Learn to change is a Non Governmental Organization that brings together a community of teachers and educators working to support educational transformation for the benefit of building sustainable democratic societies, while developing learners as whole persons (head, heart, hands).

- Learn to change is a NGO which believes in a world in which education is the foundation of a just, inclusive and thriving society. Their mission is to find new ways to educate the world about democracy and human rights.
- Their aim consists in organizing actions which support good work in the field of the education, human rights, and democratic culture.

The association grew out of a teacher-training program created for the Council of Europe of which Pascale Mompoin-Gaillard was the pedagogical adviser. The program trained teachers and academics in an educational approach inspired by the eighteenth-century Swiss teacher Pestalozzi: that an education required working "with the head, with the heart and with the hands." The program was a striking success and launched an online community of educators and professors; it was, however, stopped by the Council of Europe as it became too autonomous. The decision was made to follow up the program as an NGO, and “Learn to Change” was created in 2015. Learn to Change’s first year was dedicated to preparation or internal organization: the organization of the association and the development of the web site. Today there are 21 active members and about fifty members overall.

### **A first attempt at "spontaneous" organization**

Beginning in 2016, Learn to Change was ready to turn its attention to its work. Members were organized by preference, into 4 work groups. Every group was given an online space to work; their organization, governance, and operations were allowed to emerge organically or as their members saw fit. After one year, a review found that only the groups which had tasks related to the daily functioning of the association were really active, and that important projects were stalled. Very few things really moved forward.

Pascale's hypothesis about the inactivity was that the scattering of the people in the new context and a lack of face-to-face relationships were the causes of the difficulties. A chat was thus proposed every 15 days to revive the links. Nevertheless, the results were the same: the projects stagnated, and it was always the same few people who were doing the work.

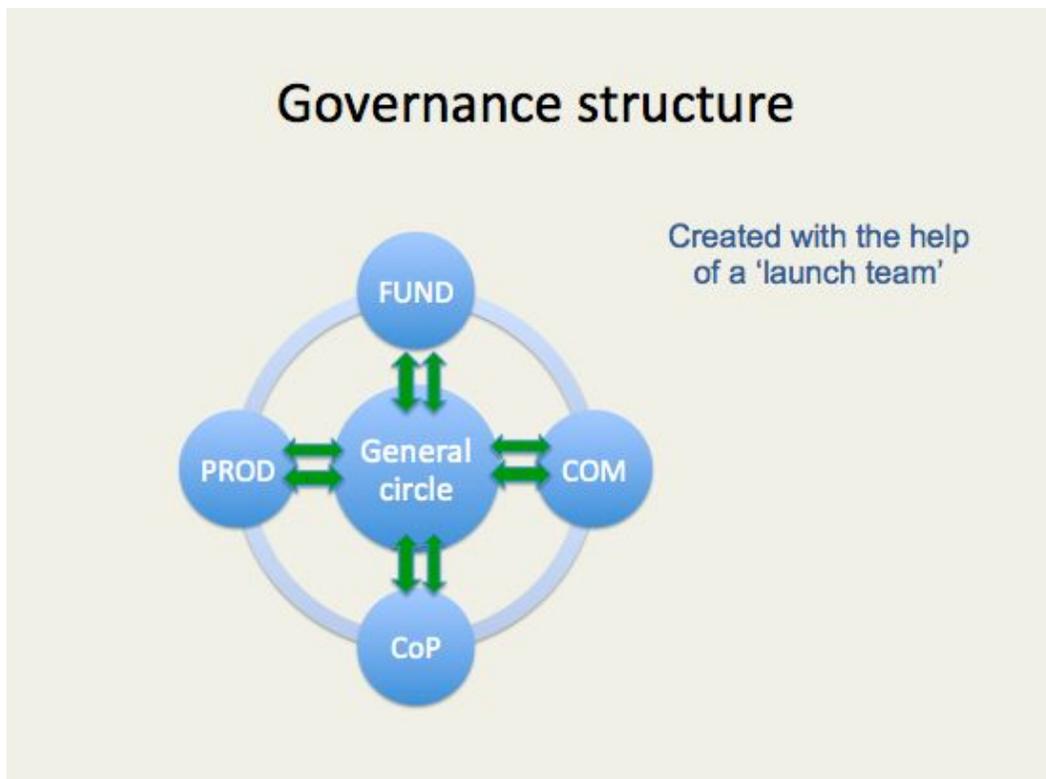
### **Sociocracy to facilitate commitment and progress**

In 2016, as in every year, a Pestalozzi summer school was organized that included a course for teachers on sociocracy. After that event, Pascale suggested a sociocratic approach for the association. She then studied sociocracy through an online course and shared some relevant documentation; this allowed people to become more familiar with its principles. The method was immediately adopted for meetings and the decision-making. Two enthusiastic members subsequently joined Pascale to draft a proposal to adopt Sociocracy. This group of three people established the first sociocratic circle, calling itself the "launch" circle.

Before submitting the proposal to adopt sociocracy, the sociocratic practice was used to write a founding text on the status of Pestalozzi community of Practice's relationship to the association.

A short time later, the launch circle made an official, online proposal to adopt this new way of working together, and the sociocratic method was adopted.

Sociocracy was implemented in Learn to Change in the following ways: circles were created from the former, already existing groups. It was decided that every meeting would be followed by a feedback forum and by analysis. The platform Ning was chosen to be used for all communication and decision-making. Google Drive allowed for the sharing of documents.



## The circles are:

### GC (general Circle)

- Aim: overall governance
- Mission: support 3 sub-circles, communicate with the association offices, establish a development strategy, and oversee general operations.
- Participants: a first link (the “leader”), a facilitator, a secretary, and 2 delegates from the FUND, COM, and PROD circles.

### FUNDS (financing)

- Aim: fundraising and finance.
- Mission: look for fundraising opportunities, manage organizational finances, and support sub-circles.

### PROD (production)

- Aim: create and publish educational resources
- mission: create "cards 4 democracy", notebooks, and other resources and support sub-circles.

### COM (communication)

- Aim: create a communications strategy and oversee communication.
- Mission: manage the blog and the social networks, and support sub-circles.

### CoP (community of practice)

- Aim: to support the community.
- Mission: moderate communications on the online platform of 2000 educators.

## Reactions, profits and results

After operating under sociocracy for one year, reactions to this new way of functioning have generally been very favorable. One of the circles remained inoperative and was discontinued. Evaluation by members showed that the community of practice, not being part of the association but rather a network of like-minded (trained in the Pestalozzi Programme) education professionals, could not be governed as an internal circle. It was decided (by consent) that the COM circle would take up the relations with the community as part of its accountabilities.

### Positive points of feedback include:

- Each member has the space to express himself, even the most introverted. If a person has nothing to say, silence is understood as a conscious communication that one has nothing more to add. If a person has a proposal, one knows that it will be heard without being immediately contradicted;
- The atmosphere of the meetings is more relaxed because the space to express opinions is fully guaranteed;
- Interpersonal relationships are equalized and strengthened because the system prioritizes the contacts of all with all;
- Elections are an opportunity for the members to openly discuss each other's qualities and contributions.

### Criticisms are also present:

- The meetings seem to take longer and decisions often have to be postponed to next meetings (Note: these criticisms faded when it was shown that pre-sociocratic decisions took just as long or longer);
- It is more difficult to connect with those who are not part of the circles you belong to;

- The meetings lack spontaneity: some people complain that the meetings are more formal than before, less warm and fun.

### Operational results

In operational terms, improvements were also seen. People are better at taking initiative and moving things forward.

- With respect to fundraising, calls for funding generated notable interest (?)
- “Cards 4 Democracy 4 All” were produced much more effectively than the “C4D-Teachers Edition” cards made before sociocracy;
- A new learning resource, “Booklets” is in the course of production.
- The website and blog are functional and a team manages to consistently produce 2 entries a month.

### Governance results

In terms of governance, sociocracy helped in sharing responsibilities among the members of the NGO. More people feel empowered and are active. People who used to dominate meetings are giving space to others. Still, the influence of the leaders remains present as they tend to be elected facilitators or leaders within the circles.

Conscious of her influence, Pascal undertook an assessment of her leadership to measure its impact and to learn how to better adjust to a more horizontal organization. She relates her experience in this [webinar ‘Storytelling of an action research’](#) within SoFa’s 2018 online conference.

**Benefits for the organization** are clear:

- a clear improvement in decision-making, resulting in more precise, more effective decisions that are more adapted to context and more flexible,
- a more visible commitment to effective action;
- an additional tool to support democracy in an organization which is specifically sensitive to it;
- the dismantling of interpersonal conflicts: expressed concerns are clearly not personal, but about the relevant proposal;
- more clarity in relationships and new, “do it together” dynamics;
- a fully inclusive process and engagement of everyone in the work;
- individual commitments reinforced and acknowledged.

### What stakes in improvement?

In terms of near-term improvement, several plans are identified:

- training is needed in general, and in particular for facilitators, to emphasize spontaneity and fun in meetings;
- measures of progress need to be set up;
- the nomination of delegates to the General Circle will change: one will be chosen by the General Circle, and the other one by the circle that he belongs to. Until now, both delegates were nominated by the sub-circles;
- the process will be adapted to other specific needs of the organisation.
- Finally, a thorough evaluation of the sociocratic method will be undertaken, which may result in changes to the NGO’s bylaws.