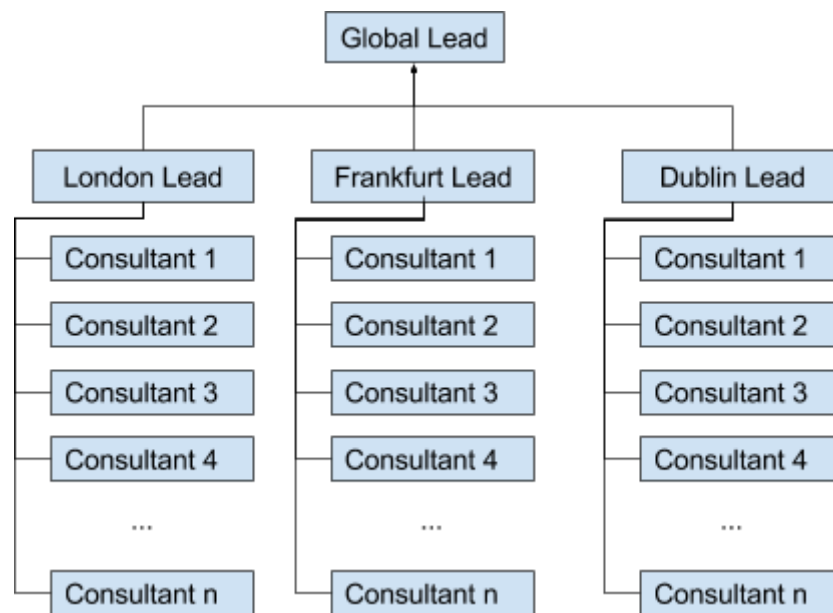## Executive Summary

- KittenTech, a consultancy, identified information was not fully disseminating across the organisation, inhibiting shared context that enables distributed decision making. Separately, not all voices were being heard during discussions, hindering effective problem solve effectively through evaluating diverse views.
- Sociocracy was considered due to its focus on formalising and encouraging information flow across the organisation to support distributed decisions, and building trust through empathy that enables the constructive conflict needed for effective decision making.
- KittenTech used Sociocratic principles to collaboratively shape a proposal for Sociocracy in KittenTech that would address the problems faced for onwards discussion with the current leadership team.

KittenTech: a Digital Transformation Consultancy

KittenTech was a young digital transformation consultancy that partnered with client businesses to help them deliver better digital products (e.g.: mobile apps) to their customers faster. This often involved helping clients restructure their business to optimise accuracy in measuring the changing needs of their clients and the speed at which they respond, such as through releasing a new or updated mobile app.

KittenTech intentionally limited the layers of leadership and, those few leaders, actively pushed decisions into their teams in order to encourage decentralised - and therefore faster - decision making. However, the fledgling consultancy faced a few issues that it wanted to resolve.

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Organisational structure at KittenTech

Firstly, as the KittenTech grew, it became more difficult to ensure information was appropriately disseminated across the organisation in the absence of a management layer. This information was often important in informing distributed decision making.

Secondly, KittenTech carefully curated a diverse set of consultants as it recognised the value of diverse viewpoints in solving problems. However, this diversity naturally led to a dichotomy, with some consultants being more outspoken and willing to share their views, and others being more quietly spoken and less forward with their ideas.

Together this helped KittenTech understand that, as it continued to grow, it would be even more important to find a method for disseminating information across the organisation and ensure all views from its diverse base of consultants were heard to inform distributed problem solving and decision making.

KittenTech realised that any method that would help solve these two organisational problems could also be informative when restructuring clients.

Sociocracy: an organisational paradigm worth considering

Sociocracy is a method for unleashing the full potential of an organisational through diffusing power, increasing transparency and encouraging empathy. This ensures individuals have the context and autonomy to make informed decisions within their domain, and have access to channels to enable decisions that are more far-reaching.

The underlying approach is through structuring the organisation into circles (or teams) that fan out from a central (or 'general') circle which is tasked with discussing the overall operations of the organisation. Each circle is tasked with a particular aim, over which they have full autonomy, and may have any number of sub-circles to help it in fulfilling part of that aim. Communication flow between circles is enabled by ensuring each circle contains two members from any sub-circle; these two members are charged with passing information and

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context in both directions. A [facilitator](#) role runs circle meetings and focuses on ensuring the views of each member is heard and understood, using [rounds](#) to prevent cross-talk and a [consent-based model](#) for informed decision making.

KittenTech and Sociocracy: fit or misfit?

Upon being fortuitously exposed to Sociocracy through one of its consultants attending SoFA's Sociocracy Leadership Course, KittenTech ran two sessions for interested consultants to together explore Sociocracy as an opportunity to tackle some of the challenges the organisation faced.

The first 90-minute session was run to give consultants an overview and hands-on taste of sociocracy. This helped them to develop enough of an understanding of Sociocracy to individually evaluate it as a potential tool for the organisation. All consultants proactively demonstrated eagerness in discussing how Sociocracy could be applied to KittenTech during the [closing round](#).

The second 90-minute session was a workshop comprising two steps: first an [agile retrospective](#) was facilitated in order to understand what aspects of the current organisational paradigm were working well and, constructively, what aspects could be improved - in this case, highlighting hearing all views and information flow. This provided context for the subsequent second step - collaboratively shaping a proposal using [Picture Forming](#) for onward discussion with KittenTech leadership.
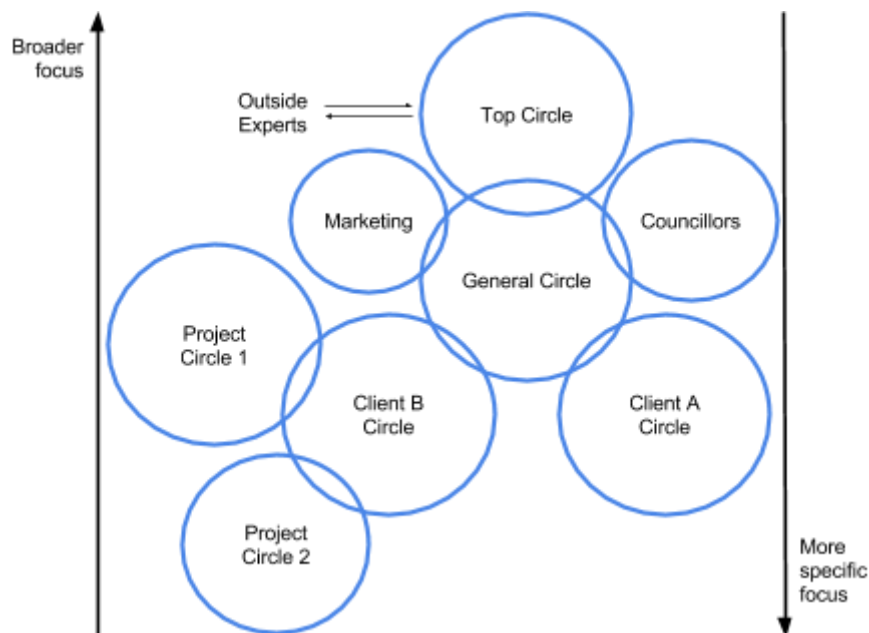

- Interaction with other organisations will take place via Top Circle (strategy).
- Current leadership should form the Top Circle.
- Circles are emergent based on need and are encouraged to be tried as an experiment.
- Circles are either focused on a project or pastoral; counsellors will have their own circle to support each other.
- Project-based circles to be based around main accounts (and projects).
- Circles will define their own budgets.
- Each circle will have a counsellor to support the growth of the individuals.
- Circles can span geographies and timezones to prevent siloing.
- Biggest size of circle should be 7 +/- 2.
- Attendance at circle (and inter-circle) meetings is mandatory.
- Decisions from meetings will be captured on open company wiki pages.
- People can rotate roles with default term of 3 months, or until circle disbands.
- New starters assigned to circle as they join the company and/or a client project.

Proposal for Sociocracy at KittenTech

The below organisational structure is an example outcome supported by the proposal. Information dissemination would be supported by centring circles around clients, as this was seen as the primary dimension of collaboration, with sub-circles forming around client projects as needed. Cross-pollination between clients would be supported by both the general circle and other dimensions of circles, such as circles for communities of practice. Circles formed around projects - and potentially around clients - would be transitory in nature - when a project ends the circle would be disbanded in favour of a circle for whatever new project - or client - comes about.

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The current leadership - given their focus on strategy - would elegantly form the basis of the Top Circle under a Sociocratic structure. Any outside experts would be best placed to interface with the Top Circle, given their consulting would likely be at the strategic level. This follows Socioracy's hierarchy of specialisation (vs. seniority), where sub-circles tend to hold a very specific focus, and the focus of the top circle (strategy) and general circle (operations) have focuses that are the most broad.

KittenTech as a Sociocratic organisation

In addition to circles based around clients, projects and communities of practice, there will be other complimenting circles, such as for the HR, sales or marketing teams. Contrary to the client and projects circles which will exist for only as long as they remain relevant, these HR, sales and marketing circles would have more permanence.

KittenTech as a Sociocracy: the path forward

For any organisation to transition from a hierarchy to a sociocratic organisation, those holding the power must first make the choice of diffusing that power across the organisation. For KittenTech, this is the next step - for the grassroots proposal to be shared, along with the associated benefits and potential obstacles, with leadership so they can make an informed decision as to whether they feel Sociocracy is the right tool given their broader strategic view of the organisation. Should leadership feel this is the appropriate way forward, the implementation and greater details can be discussed.

For just 3 hours of workshops, KittenTech felt it had created a suitable awareness of Sociocracy, and a proposal that could help share this kindled understanding with the leadership team.

Hopefully a sociocratic future awaits KittenTech, with the potential to accelerate the organisation through supporting information dissemination and the hearing of every voice.

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