

CELL STRUCTURE DESIGN PATTERNS, II

More real-world insights from the practice of consistently decentralized & democratic organizational design

BetaCodex Network Associates

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BetaCodex Network White Paper No. 20 | January 2024 | betacodex.org/white-papers



This is the 2nd part of a series of BetaCodex research papers on patterns in Cell Structure Design

In the first part of this research paper series (shown on the right) we outlined ten Cell Structure Design patterns that we consider foundational to effective organizational structure and design in pretty much every organization. In this $2^{\rm nd}$ part of the series, we will explore another set of patterns in decentralized organizational design. Compared to the first, this set of patterns is somewhat broader in scope and less tightly focused on structural arrangements: Some of the patterns may seem to be less obviously connected to organizational structures. However, these 10 themes have proven to be key during most, if not all of the dozens of Cell Structure Design efforts we have undertaken.

- Patterns 1 to 3 are related to the use and control of people's time in
 organizations, and are thus especially relevant for service-oriented
 companies, or organizations that charge external clients for their services.
- Pattern 4 and 5 cover topics related to **professional and team identities** in cell structures, and to the change of internal relationships in organizations that move from functional division to functional integration.
- Patterns 6 to 8 are related to **pay and salaries**. These matters play a big role during every Cell Structure Design adoption process. They need to be thoroughly discussed and clarified while the cell network is designed.
- Patterns 9 and 10 of this paper relate to the **adoption process** of a Cell Structure Design.

If you have read the first part of this paper series, you may choose to skip the following three pages, which serve as an introduction to Cell Structure Design and as a contextualization of the patterns discussed.



Also read BetaCodex Network research paper No. 19, "Cell Structure Design Patterns, Part 1", published July 2023

Fore more conceptual information on Cell Structure Design, visit the web page <u>www.cellstructuredesign.com</u>

A few words about 20 years of Cell Structure Design research and practice

Our work with client organizations around the BetaCodex, decentralization, and Cell Structure Design began around 2003, 5 years before the foundation of the BetaCodex Network. At the time, Niels took up his first assignment as an organizational development consultant, with a larger software development firm of 1300 people that wanted to go "decentralized and consistently self-organized". In short, they wanted to learn how to overcome departments and go "cell structure", for good. Over the course of 20 years, we have advised to over 50 organizations – large and small and from all kinds of sectors, in order to help them get this kind of transformation done, overcoming command-and-control – for good.

In short, we gathered a great deal of experience on <u>decentralization</u>. But experience is not everything, of course. **One must also produce**

Boundary (Sphere of Activity)

Outside (market)

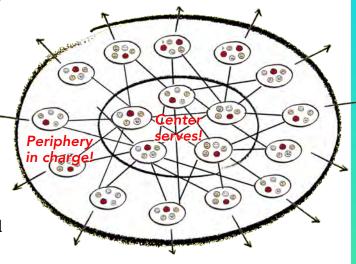
insight. From the beginning, we acknowledged that the philosophy of "decentralized org design" needed to be explored more fully, as the accompanying transformation involved overcoming all kinds of mental models and belief systems. This white paper and the preceding paper present some of those insights gathered.

When sharing research like this, there is always a risk of over-simplification. First, as researchers, we might unknowingly be over-simplifying the patterns we have observed. We may learn later that we previously overlooked something. Then, on the reader's side, the patterns we describe might be misinterpreted as *rules* or *ready-made solutions*, although they are meant as *rules of thumb* or *axioms*. We acknowledge these risks. However, it is in the nature of scientific advancement to confront such risks. We believe that the opportunities of making these insights available far outweigh the hazards, as they will enable practitioners, consultants and academics to make informed judgments on Cell Structure Design. These insights can advance learning. Ultimately, they can enable progress in organizations. It's about time.

The power of organizational decentralization is still grossly underestimated

The problem with most of today's models, frameworks, or concepts of organizational design, organizational structure and org development is that **they do not differentiate between periphery and center.** They were developed to solve the complicated problems of the industrial age. Such approaches are now outdated, and for a simple reason: they simply cannot cope with real-world complexity. The *org design* community has yet to fully grasp the connection between decentralization and high performance in complexity. The same goes for the *agile* and *lean* communities, which, implicitly or explicitly, keep promoting top-down steering and centralized command-and-control.

Our approaches are different. **There is now a triad of practical theories around decentralization, including <u>BetaCodex</u>, <u>OrgPhysics</u> and <u>Cell Structure Design</u>. These three concepts, when combined, allow all kinds and sizes of organizations to bring about consistent decentralization. In every organization, value creation flows from Center to Periphery to external market – inevitably. In complex, "red" markets, the Periphery needs to be in charge.** *This is the nature of organizational value creation in complexity***.**



But decentralization is more than just another principle for designing today's organizations as it carries a somewhat "political" message: It is rooted in the belief that all people are self-motivated, 'Theory Y' creatures who intrinsically wish to contribute to something greater than themselves. Yes, people need to work to feed themselves and their loved ones, but they also want to self-fulfill at work, if the conditions are right. Decentralization assumes that people are capable citizens, it is political in that it assumes that people need not be controlled by 'bosses' and the top, nor controlled and oppressed by "performance management" processes. In short, decentralization implies that far more organizational democracy is possible, and that such democratic distribution of power is natural to organizations. Decentralization is far more natural than command-and-control pyramids and centralized steering.

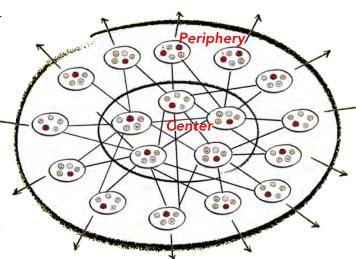
Decentralized approaches to organizational design have many roots and foundations

Different than most other organizational design approaches discussed today, <u>Cell Structure Design</u> is based on the crucial insight that, in complexity, **decentralization is paramount, and in fact inevitable.** While Cell Structure Design is rather new (it was published in 2021 by Red42 as an open source social technology), the insight that decentralization of decision-making should be the cornerstone of coherent self-organization, market-orientation and organizational democracy, is not new. The idea of decentralization shines through in the work of early pioneers of organizational theory like Mary P. Follett, as early as in the 1920s/30s (as explored in our <u>white paper No. 18</u>), and it can be found in the work of <u>Kurt Lewin</u> (1930s/40s), <u>W. Edwards Deming</u> (1950s to 1990s) and <u>Peter Drucker</u> (1060s to 2000s), among others. See overview in our white paper No. 14.

Notably, the <u>Socio-Technical Systems movement</u> around Merrelyn Emery, Fred Emery and Eric Trist of the <u>Tavistock Institute</u>, added significantly to a deeper understanding of decentralized organizational design. Starting in 1998, the <u>Beyond Budgeting Round Table</u> added further depth to the approach, thanks to its case-study research on firms like Handelsbanken.

In our work at the BetaCodex Network, several white papers are testament to our own research and advances around the matter of decentralization. First came <u>Turn your company outside-in!</u> from 2008, then papers on <u>Org Physics</u> and <u>Organize for Complexity</u> (from 2011 and 2012, respectively). The year 2021 finally saw the publication of Cell Structure Design as an *open source social technology*, available to all. For additional information, visit <u>cellstructuredesign.com</u>.





1. Invoicing is a source of pride. Responsibility for invoicing to clients is naturally devolved to periphery cells

Cells must be made fully responsible for the quality and timeliness of their invoicing. Applying this principle has several serious implications. No more "corrections" of invoices by specialized

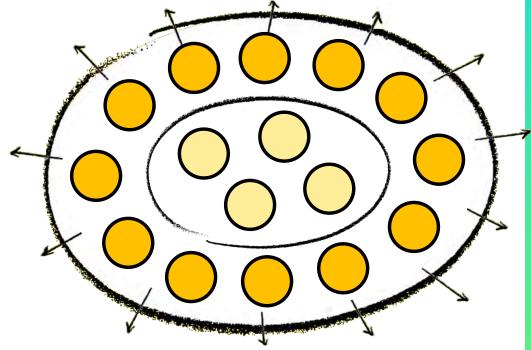
implications. No more "corrections" of invoices by specialized departments, no more "time sheet submission deadlines", no involvement in time sheet administration or control by administrative staff, no more

"reviews" by colleagues from outside the team.

Cells will take care of the process of invoicing themselves, within their respective teams. This will usually dramatically simplify the invoicing process, and eliminate sloppiness as well as rework. These changes can be said to be part of *Organizational Hygiene*.

In a cell structure, to invoice correctly and in a timely manner is a source of pride for business teams in the periphery. It carries an element of pride of craftsmanship and of identity-building. By taking full control of their invoicing, teams will become acutely aware of the bridge between client work and the cell-based P&L statements that are reviewed regurarly, at least once a month.

All cells in the periphery have external clients and invoice to their own clients



2. Stop monitoring people's time and let teams focus on client value. Banish time sheets as consistently as possible

Many companies still rely on hourly or daily rates for their billing of services, and thus on recording people's time. **The logic of time tracking pervades Alpha organizations.** Here, time tracking is done to meet several needs: to fulfill compliance requirements, to do external billing, and to supervise and control people. The latter, controlling people through time tracking, is the root problem. Such control creates regimes of micro-management, dread and fear. In a Cell Structure Design, there is no place for that kind of mess. We will explore the alternative to time-based billing in the next pattern.

In order for the Cell Structure Design to work, all internal interactions and collaboration, including conversations, measures and control must be freed from attention to time and work hours, entirely. If invoicing to external clients requires time sheets, then these time sheets must be exclusively used for invoicing, never for any kind of internal purposes.

Accordingly, project revenue sharing among cells is not to be based on hours or days worked on projects. Instead, cells should make simple agreements on how to share income and based on percentages. Examples: "We split the income from this project 30/30/40!" or, in some cases: "We share the cost of that person 50/50 for those months." As all cells in a cell structure are small, each cell will know intuitively how much time it is spent on what, and what results are being achieved. There should be no talk or controls around time within a team. A cell's focus must be on client value, the market, projects, performance (financial, satisfaction, team spirit) and the team and overall P&L.

As a consequence – and as part of *organizational hygiene*, all recording of non-invoiceable time should be stopped. For external purposes such as invoicing and compliance, be as accurate as needed – never *more* accurate than required by the external stakeholder. Legal documentation on holidays and total work hours should be strictly separated from the time sheets that are used for invoicing. This de-coupling of documentation will drastically reduce bureaucracy and will eliminate dysfunctional meddling with documentation.

This pattern usually goes along with a change in language: It is natural to stop using expressions like allocation, "transfer pricing, internal tax or service level agreements. The language used within a decentralized Cell Structure Design will instead be about sharing, pricing, serving/supporting/collaborating, solidarity, helping and value. Use these words, not authoritarian ones.

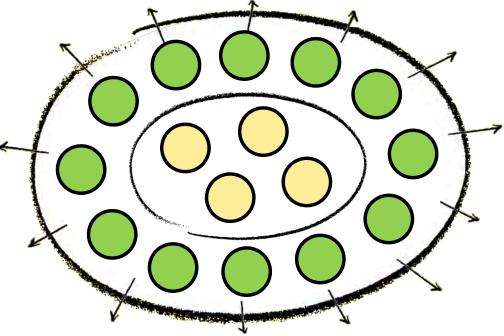
3. Enable cells in the periphery to use Value-Based Pricing. Set up the system for value-based fees to supplant time-based invoices

Cells in the periphery should be authorized to move towards *Value Based Fees* whenever they want and however they want (partially or entirely). When the cell structure goes live, cells in the periphery should be able make this move at any point, and they can begin with this whenever/however they see fit. **Each cell should decide when and how to make this kind of move for themselves.** Cells usually do not need to be forced to move to Value-Based Fees. Why? The most business-savvy periphery cells will be the fastest in making that move, anyway. Others will follow.

There is much more to the concept on Value-Based Fees than meets the eye. It changes the quality of the relationship between client and supplier, and it even changes the way proposals are written and presented. It offers opportunities for more competitive *and* more profitable pricing. It liberates service staff from the shackles of time-oriented maneuvering and internal gaming, not to mention that service delivery becomes drastically simplified.

The most prolific author on the matter we can think of is <u>US consultant Alan Weiss</u>, who produced several insightful and consistent books on the topic, all written in a crisp and highly accessible style. We recommend Weiss' excellent books on Value-Based Pricing and proposal-writing.

All cells in the periphery should be allowed (but not forced) to move to value-based fees



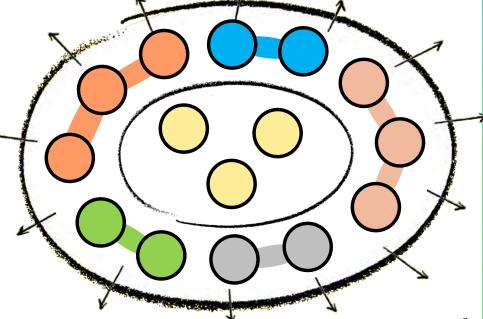
4. Scratch my back and I'll scratch yours. Simple agreements between cells in the periphery enable trusting relationships

The purpose of cell P&Ls is not to achieve accuracy in value creation accounting. Yes, those cell P&Ls are likely to deliver cost and profitability information many times more accurate than what any standard costing (or reporting with allocations) could ever achieve. But cell P&Ls are supposed not to increase accuracy, but to help both cells and the company to grow the pie, not analyze or slice the pie better. Value creation accounting throughout the cell structure is supposed to make everyone more business-savvy - with no plans and central allocations being made. This raises the question of how financially relevant internal agreements and transactions should be dealt with. The answer is straightforward: All internal agreements between cells should have 'handshake quality.'

Example: "We agreed to split the project income 50/50. Is this conversation really getting to a solution that's as fair and as simple as the agreement we already have in place?" The idea of handshake quality is not that of accuracy, but that of being fair and friendly among cells. Over time, this should lead to a culture of solidarity, with generous contributions to the whole made by all cells. When there is disagreement or conflict, direct conversation between the cells involved must be sought – not central decision-making or coordination.

During the proposal phase of every client project that involves more than a single periphery cell, the participating periphery cells will agree on their **shares of the income, which means agreeing on percentages.** Example: In the spirit of collegiality and fairness, we split that 70/30. We are confident that this agreement will allow us to run the project based on mutual trust.

Periphery cells can collaborate and reach agreements among themselves

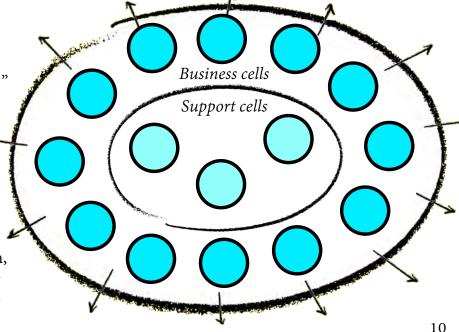


5. When functionally integrated teams supplant functionally divided tribes, professional identities are challenged

Functional division, as practiced routinely in Alpha organizations, has many side-effects. An example: in industrial production, functional division usually leads to a rather strict separation between *production* and *administration*, which then develop distinct cultures and professional identities that will distinguish their members from those of the other tribe. There often exist further kinds of tribes in industrial organizations that are based on functional division, with yet different kinds of professional identities, such as *engineering*, *research and development*, or *sales*. In Alpha organizations, **such professional identities can become more meaningful to members of the respective tribes than collective "success"**, competitive performance or quality.

When a cell structure is adopted, the functional integration accompanying it will usually lead to **most, if not all teams** integrating people from different tribes. Members of previously separate "tribes" may perceive this change as "strange" at first. Some individuals may perceive the change as difficult and challenging to their professional identities. Looking at the adoption of a cell structure this way, it is quite natural that some members of such tribes might struggle to adapt their professional identities quickly to the structural change they will experience during the transformation. We have seen these identity struggles play out in the most varied forms. Sometimes before or during the cell constitution, sometimes even months after the Go Live date. These identity matters are to be taken seriously and dealt with constructively and consistently. The struggles will fade away after a while.

Sales, Engineering, R&D, Quality,
Planning, HR, Marketing – these fairly
common departmental patterns that
shape professional identities in
command-and-control are unlikely to
continue existing in a cell structure



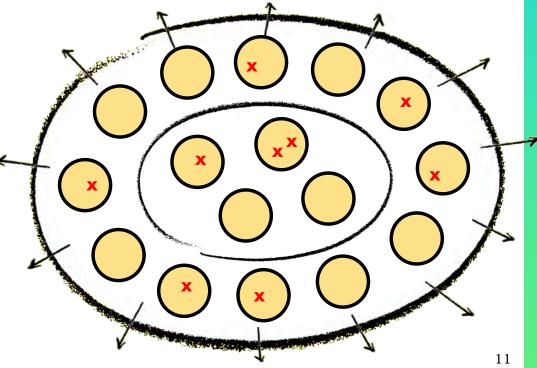
6. Salary negotiations are to be performed by individuals with appropriate mastery – not by "superiors"

In our client work around Cell Structure Design, the topic of salary negotiations usually appears during the design stage, forcefully, as a somewhat baffling topic, and as one that seems to hold back the thinking of those interested in decentralization. This topic is often a barrier to thinking the cell structure through, consistently. How do salary negotiations work when departmental structures and hierarchical relationships are removed or become less important in day-to-day operations? The solution to the problem of salary negotiations, however, is rather straightforward, in Cell Structure Design: **Salary negotiations can, and indeed should be largely decoupled from hierarchy.**

Salary conversations, which for obvious reasons usually need to be performed at least once a year, should be done by individuals with appropriate mastery, as a contribution to their organization. In short, salary negotiation becomes a serving role performed by those who are best and most effective at it, and stop being a general "duty" of managers, who are often not very good at it.

Annual salary negotiations and negotiation of raises are intellectually and emotionally challenging and need to take all kinds of aspects and contexts into account. In order to identify those who are best at it, ask in a group setting: Which members of the organization are best at having serious and fruitful conversations around individual development, personal careers and evolution of people's salaries?

Ask: Who is capable of performing great salary negotiations? The answers are likely to show that there are enough individuals with that kind of mastery

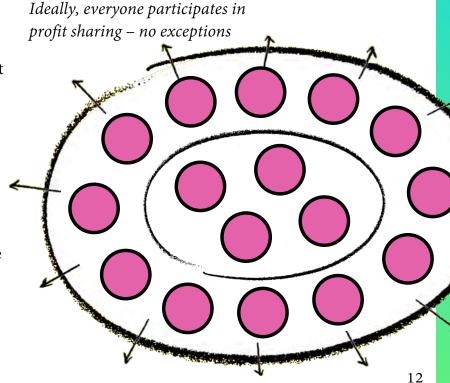


7. Profit sharing for all: Do not hesitate to install it. It is of high symbolic value

Whereas Alpha organizations cherish individual bonuses and incentives for some, Beta organizations rely on fair individual salaries and egalitarian profit sharing for all. We have learned through our transformation work that changes to these pay systems should be institutionalized right away, with the go live of the Cell Structure Design. Changing the pay systems later can lead all kinds of delays and frustrations, as pay is usually a big, though often over-accentuated part of initial contemplations on Cell Structure Design adoptions. Put simply, we observe that pay and fairness topics weigh heavily on most people's minds when departing from a command-and-control system! It is best to address these topics seriously, and to transform pay systems in sync with adopting the cell structure.

The major reason to install profit sharing for all is not so much the financial side of the arrangement, but the symbolic side of it. While individual salaries must necessarily differ between members of an organization, according to their individual market values and career paths, a profit sharing system can promote principles like egalitarianism, participation and solidarity.

From *Handelsbanken*, the Swedish bank, much can be learned about effective profit sharing in a cell structure, or a consistently decentralized organization. The bank installed its profit sharing scheme *Oktogonen* in the early 1970s, and has not changed it much since then. Everyone at Handelsbanken participates in profit sharing by the same amount, every year in which corporate profit exceeds the market average. Profit sharing can be accessed by members once they reach the age of 60. Oktogonen funds are invested in a portfolio of shares, including the bank's own, thus turning all employees into co-owners. For more on BetaCodex pay systems, check out our white paper No. 10.

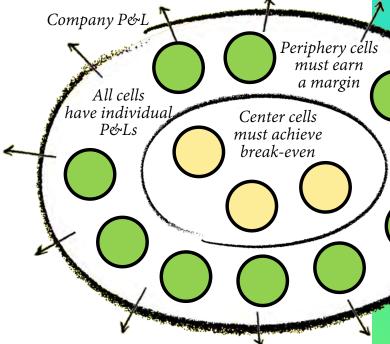


8. Shared ownership is a natural consequence of decentralization, not its precondition. The same goes for salary transparency

Logic dictates that when an organization starts to consist of small, self-organized teams that possess their own, full profit & loss statements (and with each team practicing peer recruiting), then individual salary levels will not remain a secret for too long. Individual salaries will eventually become known, sooner or later. In a way, salary transparency is a natural consequence of decentralization, of resource autonomy and of a functioning cell structure. When teams accept full economic responsibility for their actions, they will be naturally inclined to reflect upon their personal incomes (or salaries) too. This logical link between entrepreneurial thinking and transparency of salaries raises the question of when and how to move to salary transparency during the adoption of a Cell Structure Design. For the sake of impact and simplicity, we prefer an early, swift and coherent move towards salary transparency: one that makes salaries

transparent all at once - well-prepared, well-socialized and legally compliant, for sure. But there are other options for adapting to the increasing transparency that goes along with having a cell structure.

Bringing about a Cell Structure Design usually requires making changes to pay systems, e.g. moving away from incentives and individual pay (for more, see our research paper No. 10). A cell structure does not, however, rely on, nor require shared employee ownership. To propose such a connection is more ideological than factual. It should be noted that a generalized call for combining self-organization with shared employee ownership constitutes a barrier to adoption of self-organization, decentralization and democratic organization. There is no empirical or logical proof that employee ownership must precede high levels of self-organization, or decentralization. In fact, it is the other way around. Once teams and individuals take more and more entrepreneurial responsibility within an organization, why not make employees owners, too? Cases like Handelsbanken or W.L. Gore provide evidence of how to achieve this elegantly, with thousands of employees.



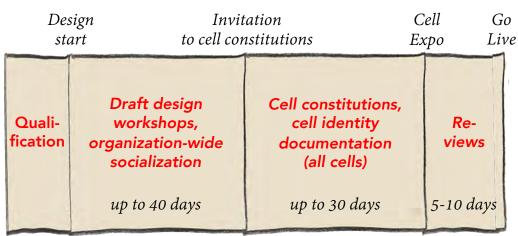
9. Overstepping of boundaries during or after the cell constitution phase must trigger a swift response

When a functionally divided, departmental organization is transformed into a functionally integrated cell structure organization, some of the newly founded teams may at first may struggle with understanding autonomy as "freedom and responsibility, combined." As we have seen in some of our transformation cases, a cell team might, for example, misinterpret the "highest levels of autonomy and self-organization" with anarchy. In one instance we witnessed, the cell team "decided" for "everything to remain as it were, for our cell" – in spite of the company's transformation. In another, rather different case, the first move of a newly constituted cell was to purchase an iPad for every team member – in the absence of a business-related need. In yet another case, a team's first action was to hold a vote against one of the team members – trying to get rid of that person, without prior consultation of anyone outside the team.

Such things do not happen often, but they *can* happen – especially when some kind of "power play" is going on within a previous departmental group or within the newly formed cell team. **When these things happen, they must be confronted firmly, swiftly, and publicly.** All the cases above were instantly confronted by the *sponsor* or top management. Swift

action is needed, as such behavior patterns could otherwise be interpreted as "okay", and get imitated by other teams. These occurrences are quite rare, and they can serve the transforming company as an opportunity to sharpen principles, to strengthen *intentional storytelling*, and to clarify differences between autonomy and anarchy, responsibility and laissez-faire, self-organization and centralized control.

After the draft design and the constitution of cells, we recommend to hold a *Cell Expo* with representatives of all cells, during which cell documentations can be reflected upon, collectively.



Total adoption time to Go Live: between 60 and 90 days

10. Adopting a Cell Structure Design takes no more than 12 weeks. OpenSpace Beta is the best available approach for its realization

We conceived and practiced two different, viable approaches to bring about a Cell Structure Design in a given organization. The safest, and the most powerful one, is in combining Cell Structure Design with the OpenSpace Beta approach to organizational transformation. The reason for combining the two is simple. There is no better way to ensure speed and robustness of the transformation process than by applying the principles of time-boxing, invitation, authorization, and undertaking the transformation together with all the willing. OpenSpace Beta allows for everyone to be authorized to cocreate the change, right from the start, through participation in a large OpenSpace meeting called OS1. This allows for more than mere participation. Invitation by the Sponsor assures voluntariness: Those who accept the invitation and attend OS1 can be expected to be willing to engage fully in the process. Such a broadly supported process, driven by "all the willing", combined with the broadest possible authorization imaginable, will be both more speedy and more robust to social dynamics than any "change management" framework.

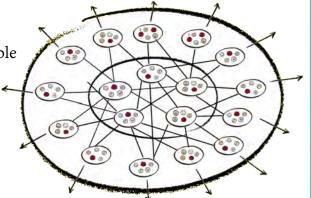
This combination of Cell Structure Design with OpenSpace Beta is the best approach we have found. We might call it the "full approach." There is an alternative, however, which we might call the "light approach" to Cell Structure Design adoption. This "light approach" does not use OpenSpace Meetings, it focuses on Cell Structure Design and involves less people in the creation of the change. It is viable only under four specific conditions, which we have successfully tested and verified in practice:

- 1. There must be firm authorization by a *sponsor*, or, alternatively, all members of *top management*, right from the start.
- 2. Even if 1) is a given, the transforming organization *cannot be too big*. Around 120 people is likely to be the limit, as social dynamics won't be as well-formed as in the *full approach*: As the *light* process does not begin and end in OpenSpace meetings (OS1 and OS2) with all the willing, engagement in the *light approach* will be considerably lower. This is likely to lead to more prolonged and more accentuated social dynamics before and after Go Live.
- 3. The principle of *invitation* must apply to all key elements of the process (depicted on the previous page).
- 4. The concept of *time-boxing* must be firmly applied to all steps of that process.

In short: **The main patterns of OpenSpace Beta are present in both the "full approach" and the "light approach".** The speed of the transformation, the high level of engagement and the robustness of the overall social dynamics cannot be assured without adherence to these fundamental patterns.

A summary of the Cell Structure Design patterns outlined in this research paper

- 1. Invoicing is a source of pride. The responsibility for invoicing to clients is naturally devolved to cells in the periphery
- **2.** Stop monitoring people's time and let teams focus on client value, and client value alone. Banish time sheets and time-tracking as consistently as possible
- **3. Enable cells in the periphery to apply Value-Based Pricing.** Set up the system in such a way that value-based fees can supplant time-based invoicing
- **4.** "Scratch my back and I'll scratch yours." Simple agreements between cells in the periphery enforce and enable trusting internal relationships, as well as network learning
- **5. Professional identities may be challenged** when functionally integrated teams supplant functionally divided tribes
- 6. Do not hesitate to institute profit sharing for all. It is of high symbolic value
- 7. Salary negotiations are to be performed by individuals with appropriate mastery, not necessarily by superiors
- **8.** Shared ownership is a natural consequence of a Cell Structure Design but not a precondition. The same goes for salary transparency
- **9.** Overstepping of boundaries during the cell constitution must trigger a swift response. Some teams may at first struggle to understand autonomy as "freedom and responsibility, combined"
- **10.** Adopting a Cell Structure Design takes no more than 12 weeks. It is best brought about through an <u>OpenSpace Beta</u> process, but a "light" approach that's fit for smaller organizations exists



More Cell Structure Design patterns may be published in future volumes of this research paper series. You are invited to share your own insights on patterns with the authors (see contact information on the authors page)!

For more information about Cell Structure Design, visit cellstructuredesign.com

Sources and recommended reading

Related BetaCodex Network white papers (available on betacodex.org/white-papers)



Turn your company outside-in. Special Edition, 2008



White paper No. 11, 2011



Org Physics - Explained Organize for Complexity Special Edition, 2012



Org Physics in Follett's words. White paper No. 18, 2021



Cell Structure Design *Patterns.* White paper No. 19, 2023

Full BetaCodex reading list

Further selected reading

Ackoff, Russell L.: Ackoff's Best – His Classic Writings on Business and Management, Wiley, 1999

Case, John: Open-Book Management – The Coming Business Revolution. HarperBusiness, 1996

Deming, W. Edwards: The New Economics for Industry, Government, Education. MIT Press, 1994

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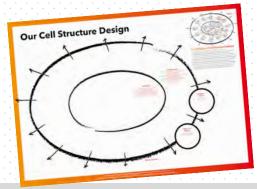


Cell Structure Design-related posters & books from Red42



Cell Structure Design concept overview poster

A1 format, folded



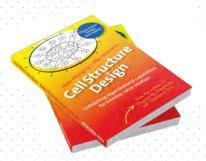
Our Cell Structure Design work poster

A1 format, folded, w/sticker sheets



Relative Targets concept overview poster

A1 format, folded



Cell Structure Design

Unleashing organizational capabilities for limitless value creation Niels Pflaeging | Silke Hermann. 2024



OpenSpace Beta

A handbook for organizational transformation in just 90 days. Silke Hermann | Niels Pflaeging. 3rd ed. 2023



Organize for Complexity

How to get life back into work to build the high-performance organization. Niels Pflaeging. 6th ed. 2023



Essays on Beta, Vol. 1

What's now and new in organizational leadership, transformation and learning. Niels Pflaeging. 2020