

# Overview: Sociocracy

Sociocracy, which means “governance by peers or colleagues,” is a governance structure and decision-making method that uses feedback loops. So, if someone asks, “What is Sociocracy?” I like to say, “It’s a governance and decision-making method with feedback loops.”

It was designed to create harmonious organizations — that’s its purpose. It’s based on three values: equivalence, transparency, and effectiveness. These values are reflected in the practice of Sociocracy too — its governance structure and its four meeting processes all demonstrate equivalence of circle members, transparency (everything is made known to everyone), and effectiveness (when done properly it tends to take less time than other methods).

Sociocracy in its modern-day version was created by Dutch electrical engineer, inventor, and cybernetics expert Gerard Endenburg in The Netherlands in the 1970s. As a boy he attended the famous Quaker Community School in The Netherlands, led by the renowned Dutch pacifist Kees Boeke, in which school decisions were made by teachers and students using Quaker-style consensus. After graduating from college Endenburg worked for the Netherlands branch of Phillips Electronics, where he invented the flat speaker used in car doors and cell phones. Endenburg focused on cybernetics, the science of communications and control. Communications and control happens naturally when you ride a bicycle — constantly adjusting to the requirements of whatever’s happening, moment by moment. You continuously adjust your body weight over the bicycle frame, adjust the direction of the handlebars, pedal faster or slower, shift gears or apply brakes as you continuously get information about the bike’s position in space through your proprioceptive sense and by what you see and hear. Your “feedback loops” are the continuous adjustments you make to keep the bike upright and going towards your destination.

Endenburg also read widely in science, mathematics, and philosophy. He was especially influenced by learning about self-organizing systems, and how everything in nature tends to self-organize . . . including people. He designed Sociocracy so that his company, Endenburg Elektrotechnik, could be a more harmonious organization, based on the values of transparency, equivalence of voice, and effectiveness. It worked!

So I like to say Sociocracy has three “parents”: Quaker-style consensus (which shows up especially in Sociocracy’s “Consent Decision-Making” method); engineering, cybernetics, and feedback loops (used in proposals); and Nature, especially self-organizing systems (reflected in its circles and double-links” governance method).

To get an overview of Sociocracy you can also say it’s one thing and four actions (one noun and four verbs). The one thing (the noun) — a governance structure of circles of people, like a committee. Each circle has a specific area of responsibilities and specific tasks to manage their area (the Finance Circle, Membership Circle, Community Building Circle, etc.) One circle is the General Circle. Each of the other circle has two people who are members of their own circle (say, the Finance Circle) and also members of the General Circle. They carry information between their circle and the General Circle. There are two of these people who are members of both circles. This is called “circles and double links.”

The four actions (the four verbs) are specific processes in meetings that each circle can do when needed: 1. Consent Decision-Making. 2. The Proposal-Forming process. 3. Selecting People for Roles. (Also called Sociocracy Elections). 4. Role-Improvement Feedback.

When a community uses Sociocracy, their governance structure is a set of semi-autonomous circles (committees), double-linked to a General Circle with two people. And, as needed, each circle uses each of the four above-named meeting processes.

**Feel free to copy & distribute this handout free of charge if you include this credit line & info**  
• [DianaLeafeChristian.org](http://DianaLeafeChristian.org) • [EcovillageNews.org](http://EcovillageNews.org) • [Diana@ic.org](mailto:Diana@ic.org) • 828-669-9702