

VEIKO VALKIAINEN

Enabling Human Flourishing and
Organizational Antifragility Through
Unlearning the Learned Helplessness
in Self-Managing Organizations



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INTRODUCTION

List of studies

This dissertation builds on three publications, comprising one peer-reviewed journal article and two contributions to scholarly edited volumes. Throughout the dissertation, these studies are referred to as *the antifragility study*, *the self-determination study*, and *the learned helplessness study*, reflecting their primary theoretical focus.

1. Valkiainen, V., & Jaakson, K. (in press). Holacracy – a design option for organizations operating in a dynamic, multicultural world. In S. A. Sackmann & C. Barzantny (Eds.), *International business in turbulent times: Dilemmas, paradoxes, and opportunities in times of uncertainties and crises*. Edward Elgar Publishing. (*Antifragility study*)
2. Valkiainen, V., & Jaakson, K. (2025). The impact of radical self-management: The formation of organizational culture that supports the satisfaction of basic human needs in Holacracy. In E. von Fircks (Ed.), *Culture and leadership: From approximation towards symbiosis* (Advances in Cultural Psychology, pp. 43–64). Emerald Publishing Limited. (*Self-determination study*)
3. Valkiainen, V. (2026). The human side of self-managing organizations: Unlearning the learned helplessness. *Human Relations*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00187267261420797> (*Learned helplessness study*)

“There is nothing as practical as a good theory”
(Lewin, 1943, p. 118).

Motivation

Across human history, hierarchical organization has neither been universal nor uncontested. Anthropological research suggests that many early human societies actively resisted the concentration of authority, developing collective norms and sanctions to prevent individuals from centralizing authority in their own hands (Boehm, 1999). Evidence indicates that many societies experimented with rotating authority, seasonal governance structures, and participatory arrangements, suggesting a degree of political plasticity in human organizing (Graeber & Wengrow, 2021). Rather than treating hierarchy as natural, these communities established egalitarian constraints on leadership and maintained social order through shared responsibility. Hierarchical arrangements, from this perspective, reflect historical developments rather than anthropological necessity. With the rise of industrial modernity, however, the scale, complexity, and technological demands of organizing increasingly favored formalized hierarchical coordination mechanisms.

Modern organizational life, therefore, is largely structured around formalized hierarchical authority (Child, 2019).¹ Concentrated authority, from a functional perspective, can facilitate collective decision-making, clarify accountability, and structure coordination in complex settings (Anderson & Brown, 2010), portraying hierarchy as a mechanism for integrating information and reducing decisional gridlock. Over time, such arrangements tend to reproduce themselves, generating self-reinforcing patterns that consolidate unequal authority structures (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). Over the past two centuries, bureaucratic hierarchy has become institutionalized as the dominant architecture for organizing economic and administrative activity (Rothschild-Whitt, 1979). Rather than being universally optimal, hierarchy can be understood as a historically dominant solution to coordination under specific technological, cognitive, and institutional constraints, with advantages and limitations that vary across contexts.

Yet empirical evidence suggests that hierarchy is frequently associated with reduced team performance and viability, particularly through increased intra-team conflict and relational strain rather than reliable coordination gains (Greer et al., 2018). Moreover, the effects of hierarchy steepness appear highly contingent, with steeper hierarchies frequently impairing cooperation, communication, and motivation (Anderson & Brown, 2010).

At the same time, autonomy satisfaction and psychological empowerment are consistently linked to higher performance, innovation, and reduced strain (Seibert

¹ Hierarchy refers to a structural differentiation of roles and responsibilities rather than inherently centralized managerial control. While hierarchical systems often concentrate decision authority in managerial positions, authority may also be distributed within hierarchical structures through participatory governance and institutionalized power-sharing mechanisms (Battilana et al., 2022).

et al., 2011; Van den Broeck et al., 2016). Structures that support autonomy tend to foster more proactive, engaged, and effective functioning. Taken together, these findings suggest that hierarchy cannot be assumed to be the default or optimal way to organize collective performance. Rather, the accumulated evidence points toward the motivational and performance advantages of more autonomy-supportive forms of organizing.

The evidence thus suggests a tension: while hierarchy can provide benefits under bounded conditions, its overall effects are mixed at best and highly contingent on context. Importantly, the historical and empirical record suggests that complex collective action does not inherently require hierarchical arrangements. Durable systems of polycentric, rule-bound self-governance have emerged and persisted without reliance on hierarchical oversight (e.g., Ostrom, 1990). This does not deny the functional contributions of hierarchy; rather, it indicates that alternative institutional arrangements are both feasible and historically grounded.

At the same time, this dissertation does not assume that distributed authority is inherently superior to hierarchical forms of organizing. An authority hierarchy can provide important benefits, including efficient decision-making, coordination of interdependent activities, and clear allocation of authority and accountability under particular conditions (Anderson & Brown, 2010; Child, 2019). Likewise, self-managing forms of organizing introduce their own challenges and demands. Consistent with contingency perspectives in organization design (Burton et al., 2020), the central concern of this dissertation is not whether hierarchy or distributed authority is inherently preferable, but rather under what conditions distributed authority becomes a viable and sustainable form of organizing.

This raises a fundamental question. If hierarchy is neither anthropologically inevitable nor consistently associated with enhanced performance and healthy human functioning, what sustains its dominance in contemporary organizational life? And under what conditions might distributed authority constitute a viable and sustainable alternative? Existing research on less-hierarchical and self-managing organizations has largely approached the topic as the structural reconfiguration of authority, particularly through the removal of managerial hierarchy and the redistribution of authority away from centralized authority positions (e.g., Bremer, 2026; Lee & Edmondson, 2017). While this body of work has generated important insights into alternative organizational designs, it has tended to assume that redistributing hierarchical authority is sufficient for self-organizing dynamics to emerge. Challenging this taken-for-granted assumption, this dissertation questions whether structural redistribution of authority alone can generate enacted self-organization, drawing on a problematization approach that emphasizes scrutinizing implicit assumptions within established theories (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011). Emerging evidence suggests that distributed authority does not automatically translate into psychologically internalized and behaviorally enacted authority, as individuals may lack the psychological readiness to assume responsibility for self-directed action (Dettmers & Bredehöft, 2020; Zolg & Herbig, 2023). These findings suggest that the persistence of hierarchy may reflect not

only structural or functional considerations, but also the psychological demands associated with internalizing and enacting distributed authority.

Taken together, these observations reveal a deeper and unresolved puzzle. As Davis (1971) argues, scholarly contributions become compelling when they challenge taken-for-granted assumptions by demonstrating that what was widely presumed natural, inevitable, or uniformly beneficial is, in fact, contingent, limited, or paradoxical. In this sense, the persistence of hierarchical authority – despite evidence of viable non-hierarchical alternatives, research documenting both the dysfunctions of hierarchy and the benefits of empowerment, and growing recognition that autonomy is psychologically demanding – constitutes a theoretically significant puzzle that calls for a deeper explanation of the structural, motivational, and authority-internalization conditions under which distributed authority can be successfully enacted.

The aim and the research tasks of the dissertation

The overarching aim of this dissertation is to develop an integrated, multi-level explanation of how distributed authority becomes enacted in self-managing organizations. Specifically, the dissertation seeks to explain how constitution-based governance practices that formally redistribute authority give rise to self-organization. It does so by identifying the design-based, motivational, and authority-internalization pathways through which distributed authority becomes operational over time. Rather than treating distributed authority as a static structural property or a purely motivational condition, the dissertation conceptualizes it as a dynamic process that unfolds through the interaction of organizational design, motivation, and authority internalization (multilevel theorizing: Kozlowski & Klein, 2000; process perspective: Van de Ven & Poole, 1995).

To accomplish this aim, the dissertation pursues four interrelated research tasks:

First, the dissertation seeks to **theorize the structural mechanisms through which constitution-based governance practices enable continuous organizational adaptation under conditions of distributed authority.** This task involves conceptualizing how governance practices that embed authority within formal roles and institutionalize ongoing tension-processing enable organizations to continuously reconfigure their internal structures through localized, iterative responses to emerging misalignments and challenges. By explicating these mechanisms, the dissertation develops a structural account of distributed authority as a governance architecture that enables adaptive capacity and organizational antifragility (Taleb, 2012) – that is, a structural capacity to improve through ongoing exposure to volatility and turbulence rather than merely resisting disruption.

Second, the dissertation seeks to **theorize the motivational mechanisms through which distributed authority influences individual functioning and well-being.** Drawing on self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2017), this task examines how governance practices that operationalize

distributed authority create autonomy-supportive conditions that satisfy individuals' basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. By specifying these mechanisms, the dissertation explains how distributed authority creates conditions that enable autonomous motivation and human flourishing.

Third, the dissertation seeks to **identify and theorize the authority internalization mechanisms through which individuals come to recognize, endorse, and enact distributed authority in practice**. While structural redistribution establishes the formal conditions for distributed authority, its behavioral realization depends on individuals' capacity to cognitively recognize, motivationally endorse, and behaviorally enact their formally granted authority. This task involves developing a process-level account of how individuals transition from hierarchical dependency toward self-authorized role ownership through the gradual internalization of authority, drawing on learned helplessness theory (Maier & Seligman, 1976, 2016).

Fourth, the dissertation seeks to **integrate these structural, motivational, and authority internalization mechanisms into a coherent multi-level explanatory framework**. This integrative task is accomplished through synthesizing insights across the aforementioned studies, enabling the dissertation to construct a unified theoretical framework explaining how distributed authority becomes enacted in organizations (consistent with established principles of theory building: Corley & Gioia, 2011; Whetten, 1989).

Taken together, the four research tasks outlined above address a common puzzle: how formally distributed authority becomes enacted in organizational practice. While self-managing organizations redistribute decision-making authority through governance structures and role-based designs, considerably less is known about the mechanisms through which such arrangements become adaptive, motivationally sustainable, and behaviorally enacted in practice. To address this puzzle, the dissertation examines distributed authority through three complementary explanatory lineages. The first study investigates how governance practices enable structural adaptation and organizational antifragility. The second examines how these same practices create conditions that support autonomous motivation and human flourishing. The third explores the authority internalization processes through which formally distributed authority becomes enacted by organizational members. Viewed as a whole, the three studies suggest that distributed authority becomes viable not merely through formal structural redesign, but through the combined operation of structural adaptation, autonomous motivation, and authority internalization mechanisms.

Moreover, these research tasks position the dissertation as a theory-building effort that advances understanding of distributed authority not merely as a structural configuration, but as a multi-level process unfolding through the interaction of organizational design, motivational forces, and authority internalization dynamics. By explicating how distributed authority becomes realized in practice, the dissertation addresses a central unresolved puzzle in organizational scholarship and provides a theoretically grounded account of the conditions under which self-managing forms of organizing can become viable and sustainable.

To clarify its scholarly positioning, the dissertation is situated primarily within research on self-managing organizations and distributed authority. While it draws on organizational design scholarship and the concept of antifragility, self-determination theory, and learned helplessness theory, these frameworks are mobilized as complementary explanatory lenses rather than as independent scholarly conversations. The central phenomenon of interest throughout the dissertation is distributed authority and the role governance practices play in enabling organizational adaptation, shaping motivational environments, and supporting the enactment of self-organization in practice.

More specifically, the dissertation explains how governance practices designed to distribute authority generate structural adaptation, autonomous motivation, and authority internalization. In doing so, it contributes primarily to scholarship on self-managing organizations, distributed authority, and alternative forms of organizing, while drawing on organizational and psychological theories to explain the mechanisms through which such organizational arrangements become viable and sustainable in practice.

The constituent studies and their integrative role in the dissertation

To provide a structured overview of the constituent studies and their integrative role in the dissertation, Table 1 summarizes each study along nine core dimensions derived from the management research canvas (Dorobantu et al., 2024) and established approaches to theory development (Corley & Gioia, 2011; Cornelissen et al., 2021; Gioia & Pitre, 1990; Whetten, 1989). These dimensions capture the motivating type of study, puzzle, research question, methodological approach, paradigmatic positioning, level of analysis, theoretical framework, explanatory mechanism, and each study's role in the overall dissertation argument.

Table 1. Overview of the constituent studies and their integrative role in the dissertation.

Dimension	Study 1: Antifragility study	Study 2: Self-determination study	Study 3: Learned helplessness study
<i>Type of study</i> (Cornelissen et al., 2021)	Conceptual redescription and explanatory extension	Conceptual theory integration and explanatory extension	Inductive empirical theory-building
<i>Puzzle</i>	How can organizations develop adaptive capacity and thrive under conditions of volatility without relying on centralized hierarchical authority?	How can motivational conditions and environments be structured to enable human flourishing in self-managing organizations?	Why does formal redistribution of authority often fail to translate into enacted self-organization, even when hierarchical authority is structurally removed?
<i>Research question</i>	If and how does governance architecture rooted in distributed authority enable continuous structural adaptation and organizational antifragility?	If and how does governance architecture rooted in distributed authority influence the satisfaction of basic psychological needs and the emergence of autonomous motivation?	How do individuals come to internalize – or fail to internalize – distributed authority during transitions to self-managing organizations?
<i>Research approach</i>	Reframing governance architecture rooted in distributed authority through Puranam et al.'s (2014) analytical lens to explicate adaptive capacity and antifragility	Integrating self-determination theory with governance architecture rooted in distributed authority to explicate mechanisms of autonomous motivation and human flourishing	Interpretive ethnographic action research, drawing on grounded theory principles (Charmaz, 2024) and the Gioia methodology (Gioia et al., 2013) to develop an inductive process model of authority internalization
<i>Paradigmatic positioning</i> (Gioia & Pitre, 1990; Schultz & Hatch, 1996)	Functionalist (with radical structuralist sensitivity to structural transformation)	Functionalist with interpretive elements (subjective experience of autonomy)	Interpretive with functionalist elements (the model of authority internalization)
<i>Explanatory lineage</i>	Structural adaptation	Need satisfaction and autonomous motivation	Authority internalization and enactment

Dimension	Study 1: Antifragility study	Study 2: Self-determination study	Study 3: Learned helplessness study
<i>Theoretical framework</i>	Puranam et al.'s (2014) universal problems of organizing framework; the concept of antifragility (Taleb, 2012); organizational design theory (Burton et al., 2020; Galbraith, 1973)	Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2017)	Learned helplessness theory (Maier & Seligman, 1976, 2016); the phenomenon of dominance complementarity (Tiedens & Fragale, 2003; Tiedens et al., 2007)
<i>Core explanatory mechanism</i>	Governance architecture rooted in distributed authority enables continuous structural adaptation by institutionalizing tension processing, allowing organizations to strengthen and evolve in response to volatility and thereby develop antifragility	Governance architecture rooted in distributed authority functions as an autonomy-supportive context that facilitates the satisfaction of basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, thereby enabling the emergence of autonomous motivation	Unlearning the learned helplessness enables authority internalization, allowing individuals to cognitively recognize, motivationally endorse, and behaviorally enact distributed authority
<i>Contribution to overall dissertation argument</i>	Demonstrates how governance architecture rooted in distributed authority provides the structural foundation for organizational adaptive capacity and antifragility	Demonstrates how governance architecture rooted in distributed authority creates autonomy-supportive motivational environments that enable human flourishing	Demonstrates that distributed authority becomes operational only when individuals unlearn hierarchical dependence and internalize their formally granted authority

Source: compiled by the author.

The three studies together form a coherent multi-level explanatory framework (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000) of distributed authority enactment. The antifragility study establishes the structural conditions by demonstrating how constitution-based governance practices foster continuous organizational adaptation and antifragility. The self-determination study explains the motivational conditions by showing how governance practices function as autonomy-supportive arrangements that foster basic psychological need satisfaction and autonomous motivation. The learned helplessness study identifies the authority internalization mechanism through which distributed authority is translated into enacted practice, demonstrating that individuals must unlearn the learned helplessness to internalize and exercise their formally granted authority. Together, these studies explain distributed authority as a multi-level process spanning organizational structure, human motivation, and authority internalization, providing an integrated account of how constitution-based governance enables both organizational antifragility and human flourishing.

Although cultural considerations appear in the two conceptual studies, culture is not treated in this dissertation as a separate explanatory mechanism or primary object of inquiry. Rather, cultural dimensions are used as contextual conditions that help specify the environments in which distributed authority may be more or less likely to be adopted, supported, and enacted. In the antifragility study, national cultural dimensions provide a contextual lens for considering Holacracy's potential in multicultural settings; in the self-determination study, organizational culture is discussed as part of the psychosocial environment through which governance practices may support basic psychological need satisfaction. Across the dissertation as a whole, however, the central explanatory focus remains on governance practices and the structural, motivational, and authority-internalization mechanisms through which distributed authority becomes enacted.

Conceptual architecture and explanatory lineages

Because this dissertation integrates structural, motivational, and authority-internalization perspectives on distributed authority, it is essential to clearly define the conceptual architecture and explanatory lineages through which these constructs are organized and related (Suddaby, 2010; Whetten, 1989). Such conceptual architecture is particularly important in multi-level theoretical work, as it provides the analytical scaffolding for distinguishing levels of analysis, tracing cross-level interactions, and avoiding the conflation of structurally distinct mechanisms (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000).

At the most general level, distributed authority refers to an organizational configuration in which decision rights are embedded in formally defined roles rather than concentrated in hierarchical managerial positions, thereby decoupling authority from positional rank and linking it to role-based accountabilities (Lee & Edmondson, 2017). Managerial authority, by contrast, refers to the conventional hierarchical arrangement in which authority to direct, evaluate, and override decisions is vested in individuals occupying superior organizational positions

(Simon, 1947). Self-managing organizations constitute formal organizational systems that intentionally redistribute managerial authority away from supervisors and embed decision-making authority within distributed role structures. Within this broader category, Holacracy represents a specific constitution-based governance architecture (Holacracy Constitution, n.d.) that operationalizes distributed authority through formal governance practices grounded in tension-processing mechanisms (Robertson, 2015). Importantly, the formal redistribution of authority characteristic of self-managing organizations creates the structural conditions for self-organization to emerge, understood as the enacted behavioral realization of distributed authority in practice. Self-organization thus refers not to a structural design, but to an ongoing process through which individuals internalize and exercise their role-based authority, thereby turning formally specified distributed authority into lived organizational reality.

Because Holacracy occupies a central role throughout the dissertation, both as an empirical setting and as a source of governance practices examined theoretically, its analytical status requires clarification. Across the three studies, Holacracy is treated neither as a scientifically validated organizational theory nor as a neutral description of organizational reality, but as a practice-generated governance system that provides a concrete empirical and conceptual object for studying the enactment of distributed authority. In the two conceptual studies, the Holacracy Constitution (Holacracy Constitution, n.d.) is approached as a codified set of formal governance practices and role-based behavioral expectations. These formal governance practices are analytically interpreted through established theoretical lenses: universal problems of organizing and organizational anti-fragility in the first study, and self-determination theory in the second. The aim of these studies is not to validate Holacracy normatively, but to theorize the structural and motivational mechanisms its governance practices would be expected to enable if enacted in practice.

The empirical study takes a complementary stance by examining how these formal expectations are taken up in lived organizational practice. It therefore distinguishes between Holacracy as a prescribed governance architecture and Holacracy as an enacted organizational reality. The central theoretical concern of the dissertation lies precisely in this gap: how formally distributed authority becomes, or fails to become, internalized and behaviorally enacted.

Building on this conceptual foundation, the dissertation develops three complementary explanatory lineages corresponding to the three studies. These lineages specify how distributed authority operates through mechanisms of structural adaptation, motivation, and authority internalization.

The first lineage explains how distributed authority enables structural adaptation. Grounded in *organizational design theory* (Burton et al., 2020; Galbraith, 1973), it interprets governance practices as mechanisms that enable continuous structural adaptation and evolution. Through the formalized processing of tensions and iterative reconfiguration of roles and structures, governance practices enable organizations to adjust their internal configuration in response to emerging challenges and opportunities. In this lineage, ongoing structural evolution enables

the emergence of organizational antifragility (Taleb, 2012), a capacity through which the organization strengthens and adapts in response to variability, uncertainty, and disruption.

The second lineage explains how distributed authority shapes motivation. Grounded in *self-determination theory* (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2017), it interprets these governance practices through a motivational lens. In this perspective, governance practices operate as autonomy-supportive mechanisms by creating organizational conditions that support the satisfaction of individuals' basic psychological needs. By providing role-based authority, tension-processing meeting formats, and participatory decision-making templates, governance practices create contexts that foster autonomous motivation and psychological well-being. This motivational lineage explains how distributed authority can support human flourishing by enabling individuals to experience their work as self-directed, offering a sense of mastery, and connected to others.

The third lineage explains how distributed authority becomes internalized and enacted. Grounded in *learned helplessness theory* (Maier & Seligman, 1976, 2016), it examines the psychological conditions under which distributed authority becomes enacted in practice. While governance architecture provides the infrastructure for distributed authority, its behavioral enactment depends on human-centered boundary conditions that enable individuals to unlearn the learned helplessness and internalize their formally granted authority. The empirical analysis identifies three such boundary conditions: clarity of role boundaries and responsibilities, purpose-driven proactive behavior, and complex social interaction. These conditions together facilitate the psychological mechanism of authority internalization, understood as the process through which individuals recognize, endorse, and enact the authority embedded in their roles. Authority internalization, in turn, enables the emergence of self-organization as the behavioral realization of distributed authority.

Taken together, these three explanatory lineages show how constitution-based governance practices give rise to interrelated processes operating across levels (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995). At the level of structural adaptation, governance practices enable continuous organizational adaptation and antifragility. At the motivational level, they serve as autonomy-supportive practices that foster autonomous motivation and human flourishing. At the level of authority internalization, they create the conditions under which individuals recognize, endorse, and enact formally distributed authority. By explicitly distinguishing these levels and their mechanisms, the dissertation provides an integrated, multi-level account of how distributed authority is structurally configured, motivationally experienced, and practically enacted (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000).

Novelty of the research

The two conceptual studies: Translating practice into theoretical explanation

Holacracy was explicitly created and developed by its founder as a practice and “social technology” rather than as a theory. As Robertson (2015, p. 13) states, “Holacracy is above all a practice, not a theory, idea, or philosophy,” emphasizing that it emerged through “trial and error, evolutionary adaptation, and ongoing experimentation,” rather than through prior theoretical design. This makes Holacracy an appropriate object for phenomenon-driven theorizing, where a practice-generated and still insufficiently understood organizational phenomenon becomes the starting point for conceptual development (Ter Wal et al., 2026). Such practice-generated innovations often provide the empirical foundation for theoretical development, as scholars note that important organizational theories frequently emerge from attempts to explain novel practices (Ployhart & Bartunek, 2019). The present dissertation undertakes the task of theorizing Holacracy by embedding its constitution-based governance practices within established theoretical lenses, transforming practice into a conceptually ordered representation (Weick, 1989). The studies advance theory on distributed authority (following Whetten, 1989) by explicating not only the what, but also the how and why underlying its functioning and consequences.

The two conceptual studies offer a theoretical translation of Holacracy by applying established theoretical lenses to a governance framework originally developed as a practice in real-life organizational settings (Corley & Gioia, 2011). At the macro level, the study focusing on organizational antifragility reconceptualizes Holacracy through Puranam et al.’s (2014) 4+1 universal problems of organizing framework. By redescribing Holacracy as an unconventional solution to universal organizing problems, the study makes its governance practices theoretically intelligible by showing how decentralized tension processing generates local adaptive capacity. Building on this structural perspective, the study theorizes its adaptive properties as a form of organizational antifragility (inspired by Taleb, 2012) and reframes Holacracy from a self-management practice into a design configuration capable of thriving under volatility and uncertainty. Consistent with Weick’s (1989) conception of theory construction as disciplined imagination, the study engages in conceptual redescription by reframing Holacracy’s governance practices into organizing principles.

Complementing this macro-level analysis, the self-determination study grounds Holacracy’s constitution-based governance practices in a well-established motivational theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2017). By linking role-based authority, tension-processing meeting formats, and participatory decision-making templates to the satisfaction of basic psychological needs, the study explains, in Whetten’s (1989) terms, how and why radical distribution of authority works at the micro level of human motivation. This move reframes Holacracy not merely

as a constitutional governance architecture, but as a system of practices with identifiable psychological consequences.

A multi-level theoretical architecture across the two conceptual studies

This dual contribution becomes particularly visible in the multi-level structure of the theoretical architecture. The antifragility study operates primarily at the macro level, theorizing Holacracy as a systemic design configuration that addresses universal organizing problems. The self-determination study, on the other hand, operates at the micro level, explicating the motivational mechanisms through which governance practices affect individual need satisfaction and autonomous motivation.

Taken together, the two studies construct a coherent theoretical architecture that links macro-level design logic with micro-level motivational dynamics, consistent with multilevel theory emphasizing the integration of structural and motivational processes across levels of analysis (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000). Holacracy is thus theorized simultaneously as an organizing configuration capable of enhancing adaptive capacity at the organizational level and as a governance system capable of supporting basic psychological need satisfaction and human flourishing at the individual level.

The empirical study: Phenomenon-based theorizing in action

The empirical study on learned helplessness contributes by theorizing an observed phenomenon that has received limited attention in the literature on self-managing organizations: the process through which role holders internalize authority under distributed authority. Rather than beginning from an abstract theoretical model and applying it to a research setting, the study emerges from a recurring empirical pattern observed in the field and develops a conceptual explanation that makes this pattern theoretically understandable. In this sense, the study aligns with a phenomenon-based theorizing perspective (Dencker et al., 2023; Fisher et al., 2021; Lumineau et al., 2024; Ter Wal et al., 2026), in which the phenomenon itself motivates both empirical inquiry and theoretical refinement. This approach resonates with what Ployhart and Bartunek (2019) describe as “phenomenal theory,” in which theoretical development emerges from attempts to explain empirically observed organizational practices and phenomena.

Human inertia in changing over to distributed authority

Importantly, the study highlights a dimension that remains underexplored in research on self-managing organizations: the persistence of human inertia and historically conditioned patterns of dependence that do not automatically adjust to structural redesign. Much of the literature on distributed authority focuses on the structural design of organizations without formal hierarchy, while largely assuming that individuals will adapt smoothly to the redistribution of authority (e.g., Bremer, 2026; Lee & Edmondson, 2017). The present study challenges this assumption by demonstrating that deeply internalized hierarchical conditioning –

shaped by prior organizational and institutional contexts – can constrain individuals’ ability to enact distributed authority. In this respect, the phenomenon is not merely one of structural change, but also of psychological rigidity in re-orienting action under governance practices that redistribute authority (e.g., Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). The focal phenomenon concerns the psychological transition that unfolds when hierarchical authority is formally withdrawn and individuals are required to assume full role-based responsibility. The study theorizes this transition as a process of unlearning the learned helplessness and specifies the mechanisms and boundary conditions through which distributed authority can catalyze this shift.

Following Whetten (1989), the current study clarifies the what of the phenomenon – unlearning the learned helplessness in a distributed authority context – and explicates the how of its practical unfolding and the why by showing how the removal of hierarchical fallback options generates both strain and developmental growth. Rather than treating radical distribution of authority merely as an organizational design choice, the study explains the psychological work required to inhabit distributed authority and the conditions under which this work becomes enabling rather than paralyzing. Extending this perspective, recent work on democratic organizing conceptualizes unlearning as an essential relational process enacted through social interaction (Powell & Bartels, 2026). This provides support for the present study’s emphasis on interactional dynamics as a key condition for the internalization of distributed authority.

A multi-level and temporal process of internalizing authority

Crucially, the contribution is both multi-level and temporal. The empirical analysis reveals an interaction between past structural conditioning and present governance practices. Hierarchical socialization, acquired over time within traditional authority systems, continues to shape expectations, habits of action, and interpretations of responsibility even after authority has been formally redistributed. This historical baggage interacts in real time with governance practices that instantiate distributed authority, producing tension between inherited patterns of dependence and newly required forms of agency.

This temporal lag between structural redistribution and psychological enactment requires a multilevel theoretical lens, as structural arrangements and psychological orientations operate at different levels and follow partially independent processes (Klein et al., 1994). Structural authority can be formally reassigned at the organizational level with a stroke of a pen, yet its behavioral enactment depends on individual-level cognitive and motivational reorientation that unfolds over time through experience. The uneven realization of distributed authority thus reflects not a structural deficiency, but a cross-level transition process in which organizational redesign precedes and gradually enables psychological internalization.

The study engages in disciplined theorizing by transforming this empirically observed interaction into a clearly articulated process. Transitioning to distributed authority is treated as a process of unlearning the learned helplessness that reveals

the dynamic interplay between past institutional structures and present enactment of authority (Barley & Tolbert, 1997). The findings suggest that the internalization of distributed authority unfolds as a temporal process in which role holders renegotiate historically embedded patterns of dependence while engaging new governance practices in the present (Sydow et al., 2009). Prior hierarchical conditioning continues to shape expectations and interpretations of responsibility, yet these inherited orientations are gradually reworked through situated judgment and the ability to see oneself as an autonomous role holder (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). The transition to distributed authority thus emerges not merely as a structural redesign, but as a developmental reconfiguration of agency over time. The contribution lies not only in documenting a case of transition to distributed authority, but in articulating a theoretically grounded account of the psychological dynamics through which distributed authority is internalized and realized in practice over time.

In doing so, it complements the conceptual studies' macro- and micro-level theorizing by demonstrating how distributed authority is experienced, resisted, negotiated, and ultimately enacted in practice.

A multi-paradigm theoretical architecture of the dissertation

Having outlined the novelty of the two conceptual studies and the empirical study, it is also important to clarify how the dissertation's theoretical architecture operates across paradigmatic positions. Beyond the multi-level structure developed through the conceptual studies and the temporal account of authority internalization developed through the empirical study, the dissertation also reflects a multi-paradigm orientation in which each study is anchored in a primary paradigm while incorporating complementary elements from adjacent paradigms (Gioia & Pitre, 1990; Schultz & Hatch, 1996).

The antifragility study is primarily functionalist in treating distributed authority as an objective governance architecture that shapes adaptive capacity, while also drawing on radical structuralist insights through its emphasis on structural transformation under conditions of turbulence. The self-determination study remains primarily functionalist in its focus on motivational mechanisms, while incorporating interpretive elements by attending to the lived experience of autonomy, competence, and relatedness within a distributed authority framework. The learned helplessness study is primarily interpretive in its concern with how individuals experience, negotiate, and internalize distributed authority over time, while also incorporating functionalist elements through its process model of authority internalization.

Taken together, the dissertation does not collapse paradigms into a single synthesis, but instead mobilizes their interplay to explain distributed authority as simultaneously a governance structure, a motivational environment, and a subjectively enacted organizational reality (Schultz & Hatch, 1996).

Researcher positionality and reflexive stance

Having outlined the dissertation's scholarly motivation, research aim, and contribution, it is important to clarify my own position in relation to the phenomenon under study. The following section therefore reflects on the personal, professional, and intellectual background through which my interest in distributed authority and self-managing organizations developed, and on how this background shaped both my access to the field organization examined in the learned helplessness study and my interpretation of the empirical material generated through that study.

My interest in distributed authority and self-managing organizations emerged long before my formal involvement with Holacracy. Since 2016, I have hosted a weekly leadership podcast in which I have conducted hundreds of conversations with leaders from different sectors and organizational contexts. One recurring question I posed to guests concerned their experience of leadership success: when had they genuinely felt successful as leaders? While the answers varied considerably, a recurring pattern gradually became apparent. Many leaders described their greatest sense of success not in terms of personal achievement, but in observing their teams become increasingly independent and less reliant on them for day-to-day decision-making. As team members developed greater autonomy, initiative, and ownership, leaders often reported experiencing a deeper sense of accomplishment. These recurring observations sparked my interest in the broader phenomenon of distributed authority, self-management, and organizational forms that seek to reduce dependence on traditional managerial hierarchies.

Around the same time, influential works such as Laloux's *Reinventing Organizations* (2014) and Robertson's *Holacracy* (2015) attracted considerable attention and further stimulated my interest in alternative approaches to organizing. Motivated by both scholarly curiosity and practical interest, I subsequently completed the official Holacracy Practitioner Training offered by HolacracyOne, the organization founded by Brian Robertson, who developed Holacracy. Since then, I have participated in several projects involving the application of distributed authority practices across diverse organizational settings.

My interest in self-managing organizations is not rooted in a belief that Holacracy represents a universally superior organizational form or a normative ideal toward which organizations should necessarily aspire. Rather, it reflects a broader and longer-standing interest in questions of human agency, autonomy, responsibility, and participation in organizational life. My academic background in psychology, my training in gestalt psychotherapy, and my long-standing engagement with leadership practice and development predisposed me to view these questions as both practically significant and theoretically intriguing. These backgrounds also shaped my sensitivity to questions of agency, responsibility, development, and the relationship between formal structures and human experience. I therefore do not claim a value-neutral position with respect to the desirability of human agency, participation, or opportunities for self-direction at work. Instead, I acknowledge these commitments explicitly while seeking to examine em-

pirically how such aspirations become enacted, constrained, transformed, or even undermined in organizational practice. From this perspective, Holacracy is not treated as an object of advocacy but as one particularly well-established and analytically useful setting in which questions concerning distributed authority, responsibility, and self-organization can be examined.

My engagement with the field organization examined in the learned helplessness study was informed by prior experience with Holacracy. Entering the study, I was familiar with the constitutional logic of distributed authority and the governance practices through which organizations seek to operationalize distributed authority. I was also aware, from prior scholarship and practitioner experience, that transitions from hierarchy to self-managing forms of organizing often involve difficulties in enacting newly distributed authority. Thus, the empirical challenge was not entirely unexpected. What made this field study analytically important, however, was the way these familiar difficulties gradually became theoretically consequential.

Consistent with my pre-understanding (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2022), I initially expected the primary challenges of implementation to revolve around learning new governance processes, clarifying roles, and adapting to new coordination mechanisms. However, early field observations pushed me to reconsider whether these difficulties could be understood merely as implementation resistance or adaptation problems. My initial impression was that people appeared unusually passive and silent, as if holding back. Holacracy meetings felt forced, and interactions seemed unnaturally constrained. Similarly, during fieldwork, I observed a striking lack of engagement as people navigated the transition toward distributed authority. These observations left me asking: “What is happening here? Why are people unreceptive?” Rather than revealing a completely unfamiliar problem, the field sharpened and deepened my understanding of a familiar practitioner concern by transforming it from a practical implementation challenge into a theoretical puzzle through the questioning of previously taken-for-granted assumptions (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011). Over time, this redirected my attention toward the psychological processes through which authority becomes internalized and enacted. The central puzzle gradually shifted from understanding how distributed authority systems operate to understanding how individuals come to experience themselves as legitimate agents of authority within such systems.

Importantly, my practitioner background initially oriented me toward understanding Holacracy primarily as a governance system designed to increase clarity, transparency, and distributed authority. Consequently, some of my early interpretations emphasized participants’ difficulties in adapting to the new system rather than questioning the assumptions embedded within the system itself. Reflexive engagement with the puzzling observations, peer discussions, and extant scholarship helped me critically examine the assumptions underlying my initial interpretations (Hibbert et al., 2014) and recognize that participants’ hesitation, resistance, and recurring dependence on former managers could not be adequately explained as misunderstanding, lack of training, or reluctance to change. Instead, these observations pointed toward a deeper psychological phenomenon

concerning the internalization of authority itself. The concepts of authority internalization and unlearning the learned helplessness emerged as central theoretical lenses through this ongoing attempt to understand the discrepancy between formal authority redistribution and its practical enactment.

My background positioned me in what Kreiner and Joshi (2021) describe as a liminal position between practitioner and researcher, simultaneously providing privileged access to the field while creating the need for heightened reflexive awareness regarding my own assumptions and interpretations. This liminal position simultaneously expanded what could be observed and shaped how those observations were initially interpreted. I acknowledge that practitioner pre-understanding may introduce interpretive biases, but, drawing on Alvesson and Sandberg (2022), I also treat it as a potential interpretive resource. When mobilized reflexively and systematically, such pre-understanding can serve as an interpretation enhancer and a horizon expander, enriching the theorizing process by opening up novel avenues of inquiry and deepening engagement with the empirical material.

At the same time, practitioner engagement creates risks of over-identification with the phenomenon under study. To mitigate these risks, the research incorporated multiple complementary reflexive practices (Attia & Edge, 2017). These included systematic autoethnographic audio-journaling throughout the fieldwork, regular peer debriefing, selective member validation, and the continuous interrogation of emerging interpretations in light of surprising empirical observations (Hibbert et al., 2014).

Consistent with abductive perspectives on theory development (Mantere & Ketokivi, 2013), this reflexive process involved not only documenting observations but also questioning whether empirical surprises challenged my initial practitioner assumptions and required the reformulation of emerging theoretical explanations.

That said, this dissertation is informed primarily by an interpretive understanding of social reality, while remaining open to theoretical perspectives that illuminate different aspects of the phenomenon under study. In this spirit, I adopt Fuhse's (2022) view that theories should be assessed less by their ontological commitments than by what they reveal, how they connect to empirical manifestations, and the new lines of inquiry they inspire. This position is consistent with Cornelissen's (2017) argument that qualitative research should not be assessed against positivist standards of objectivity but valued for its distinctive explanatory potential (see also Amis & Silk, 2008). The contribution of this dissertation therefore lies in generative theorizing grounded in deep field engagement. It offers one interpretive pathway among many, with its insights transparently bounded by reflexivity and methodological self-awareness.

Contribution of individual authors

The antifragility study represents a collaborative effort. The initial research idea, the conceptual framing of Holacracy as an antifragile system, and the development of the core theoretical argument were led by the author of this dissertation. The author was primarily responsible for integrating the concept of antifragility and for developing the governance-based explanation of organizational adaptability. The co-author, Krista Jaakson, made a substantial contribution by developing and integrating the cultural perspective, including the analysis of how cultural dimensions influence the functioning of Holacracy in different contexts. This contribution added an important complementary lens to the paper and strengthened its theoretical scope. The writing process was collaborative, with the author leading the development and integration of the governance-based antifragility argument, while the co-author developed and articulated the cultural perspective, and both authors engaged in iterative co-writing and refinement of the manuscript.

The self-determination study was primarily developed by the author of this dissertation, who led the conceptualization of the research idea, the theoretical integration of Holacracy with self-determination theory, and the overall structure of the argument. The author prepared the initial manuscript draft, including the core theoretical framing and analysis. The co-author, Krista Jaakson, contributed through ongoing supervisory dialogue, intellectual feedback, and by advancing the cultural perspective of the study. Her contributions helped sharpen the conceptual argument and enhance the overall coherence of the manuscript, particularly in its cultural interpretation.

The learned helplessness study is a sole-authored publication. The author of this dissertation was fully responsible for all aspects of the research, including conceptualization, research design, data collection, analysis, and writing of the manuscript.

Acknowledgements

Looking back, I realize that this dissertation is the culmination not only of the past five years, but of a much longer journey. More than twenty-five years ago, I began my doctoral studies in social psychology at the University of Helsinki. Life, however, had other plans. My academic path was interrupted as I pursued opportunities beyond the university, gradually building more than two decades of experience as a leader, working closely with leaders and teams, and later helping to develop leadership and teamwork through training and coaching. At the time, it felt as though I had left academia behind. Only now do I understand that those years were not a detour, but an essential part of the journey. They shaped both the questions that eventually became this dissertation and the person I had to become in order to write it.

I have always believed that we are shaped by the people we meet along the way. Looking back, I am deeply grateful to the many people who, knowingly or unknowingly, opened doors, created opportunities, and encouraged me to take paths that I might otherwise never have taken.

First and foremost, I wish to express my deepest gratitude to my PhD supervisor, Associate Professor Krista Jaakson. In many ways, this journey began with a simple conversation around a leadership podcast that I host and a shared interest in bringing practice and academia closer together. Thank you for believing in me, for your steady support throughout the years, and for creating the conditions that allowed this journey to unfold.

I am also profoundly grateful to the members of the organization that became the setting for my ethnographic research. What began as an invitation from a former colleague to think together about how a more proactive organizational culture might emerge gradually evolved into a shared journey of exploration and change. Thank you for generously opening your world of work to me, for allowing me to become part of your everyday organizational life, and for trusting me with your experiences, uncertainties, frustrations, and aspirations. This dissertation would simply not exist without your openness and willingness to engage in what was, for all of us, a rather unconventional experiment.

Along the way, I have been fortunate to encounter scholars whose encouragement and generosity opened new paths at important moments of my development. I am grateful to Professor Jaan Valsiner, whose willingness to engage in a brief exchange of ideas unexpectedly led to my first scholarly publication. My sincere thanks also go to Professor Sonja Sackmann, whose invitation to contribute to a collective scholarly volume came at exactly the right moment and provided an opportunity to further develop ideas that were only beginning to take shape. I am also grateful to Professor Waldemar Kremser for his openness to discussing my emerging ideas at the beginning of my doctoral studies, to Professor Nicolai J. Foss for generously engaging with early manuscript drafts and offering thoughtful written feedback, and to Professor Michael Y. Lee for his early intellectual encouragement and stimulating conversations that helped shape the development of the empirical study. Finally, I wish to express my deep gratitude to Professor Dennis Schoeneborn for recognizing the scholarly potential of this dissertation's core contribution at a stage when the manuscript was still highly formative, and for guiding it through a review process that ultimately helped it become what it was capable of becoming. I am equally grateful to the reviewers, editors, and many discussants whose thoughtful and constructive comments helped shape this work as it evolved.

My thanks also go to the many colleagues, collaborators, students, and friends whom I have had the privilege of meeting throughout these years. Whether through research collaborations, conference conversations, classroom discussions, or informal exchanges, each of you has contributed in some way to my own intellectual and personal development. Teaching, in particular, has been one of the greatest gifts of this journey. Developing new courses, supervising students, and discussing their ideas has reminded me time and again that learning is never a

one-way process. I have learned at least as much from my students as they have learned from me.

Finally, I owe more than I can adequately express to those closest to me. Your patience, encouragement, and unwavering belief in me made it possible to complete a journey that began many years ago and, at times, seemed unlikely ever to reach its conclusion.

This dissertation may carry a single author's name, but it is, in truth, the product of countless conversations, unexpected encounters, and people who, often without realizing it themselves, opened doors that changed the course of my life. For all of that, I am profoundly grateful.

Glossary of terms

Structural foundations

Distributed authority. Distributed authority refers to an organizational configuration in which decision authority is embedded in formally defined roles rather than concentrated in hierarchical managerial positions. Authority is exercised by role holders within clearly specified domains of responsibility and coordinated through constitution-based governance processes that enable ongoing adaptation of roles and structures.

Governance architecture. Governance architecture denotes the formal structural design through which distributed authority is institutionalized in an organization. In the case of Holacracy, this architecture is codified in the Holacracy Constitution and specifies how authority is allocated to roles, how roles are organized into circles, and how governance processes regulate structural evolution.

Constitution-based governance practices. Constitution-based governance practices refer to the institutionalized procedures through which the governance architecture is enacted in everyday organizational life. These include structured governance meetings, tactical meetings, role definition processes, and formal tension-processing mechanisms that allow role holders to initiate changes in roles, responsibilities, and organizational processes.

Core process mechanism

Distributed tension processing. Distributed tension processing refers to the systematic identification, articulation, and resolution of tensions – defined as perceived gaps between the current state and a potential improvement – by role holders within governance and tactical processes. Through this mechanism, distributed authority enables continuous local adaptation of organizational roles, processes, and structural arrangements.

Autonomy-supportive practices. Autonomy-supportive practices refer to organizational practices that support the satisfaction of individuals' basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, as conceptualized in self-determination theory. When constitution-based governance practices distribute decision authority to roles and enable role holders to initiate changes through

tension processing, they can function as autonomy-supportive practices that foster autonomous motivation.

Autonomous motivation. Autonomous motivation refers to a form of motivation characterized by volition and psychological ownership of one's actions. Within distributed authority systems, autonomous motivation emerges when governance practices support the satisfaction of individuals' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Psychological dynamics

Authority internalization. Authority internalization refers to the psychological process through which role holders come to recognize, endorse, and enact the role-based authority formally granted within a distributed governance system. This process involves cognitive recognition of role-based authority, motivational endorsement of responsibility for role-based action, and emotional regulation under conditions of distributed authority.

Hierarchical conditioning. Hierarchical conditioning refers to learned behavioral patterns developed through prolonged exposure to hierarchical authority systems, including habits of approval-seeking, responsibility deflection, and hesitation in exercising independent judgment. These patterns may persist even after formal authority structures are redistributed.

Unlearning the learned helplessness. Unlearning the learned helplessness refers to the gradual process through which role holders overcome hierarchical conditioning and develop the capacity to exercise role-based authority autonomously. This process involves abandoning learned patterns of passivity and cultivating proactive responsibility for role-based action.

Boundary conditions for authority internalization. Boundary conditions for authority internalization refer to the experiential conditions that enable role holders to internalize and enact distributed authority in practice. In this dissertation, three inductively derived boundary conditions were identified: clarity of role boundaries and responsibilities; purpose-driven proactive behavior; and complex social interaction. These boundary conditions are analytically distinct from constitution-based governance practices. Governance practices describe the formal institutional procedures through which authority is structurally redistributed, whereas boundary conditions capture the lived, subjective experience through which role holders interpret, internalize, and enact those practices.

Outcomes and system effects

Enacted distributed authority. Enacted distributed authority refers to the behavioral realization of role-based authority when role holders actively exercise their formally granted decision rights, process tensions, and participate in governance processes.

Self-organization. Self-organization refers to the emergent coordination of organizational activity through decentralized decision-making and locally enacted authority rather than hierarchical supervision. Within the framework of this dissertation, self-organization emerges when distributed authority is consistently

enacted by role holders through constitution-based governance practices following the internalization of role-based authority.

Organizational antifragility. Organizational antifragility refers to the capacity of an organization to strengthen and improve through exposure to volatility, disruption, and environmental change. In distributed authority systems, antifragility emerges through continuous structural adaptation enabled by distributed tension sensing and governance-based role reconfiguration.

Human flourishing. Human flourishing refers to a state of psychological well-being and optimal human functioning characterized by vitality, engagement, and meaning. Within distributed authority systems, flourishing emerges when governance practices support the satisfaction of individuals' psychological needs and foster autonomous motivation.

Together, these concepts form the conceptual architecture through which this dissertation explains how distributed authority is structurally designed, psychologically internalized, and behaviorally enacted.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW: THE PUZZLE OF DISTRIBUTED AUTHORITY

This historical overview traces two partially decoupled trajectories. The first concerns the historical-theoretical movement toward greater autonomy in management, organization, and motivational scholarship. The second concerns individuals' capacity to internalize and enact authority in practice. Although these developments have progressively expanded the conceptual foundations for distributed authority, they have not necessarily evolved in tandem, resulting in a growing gap between autonomy-supportive forms of organizing and their practical enactment. Figure 1 synthesizes this cross-level misalignment and frames the central puzzle motivating this dissertation.

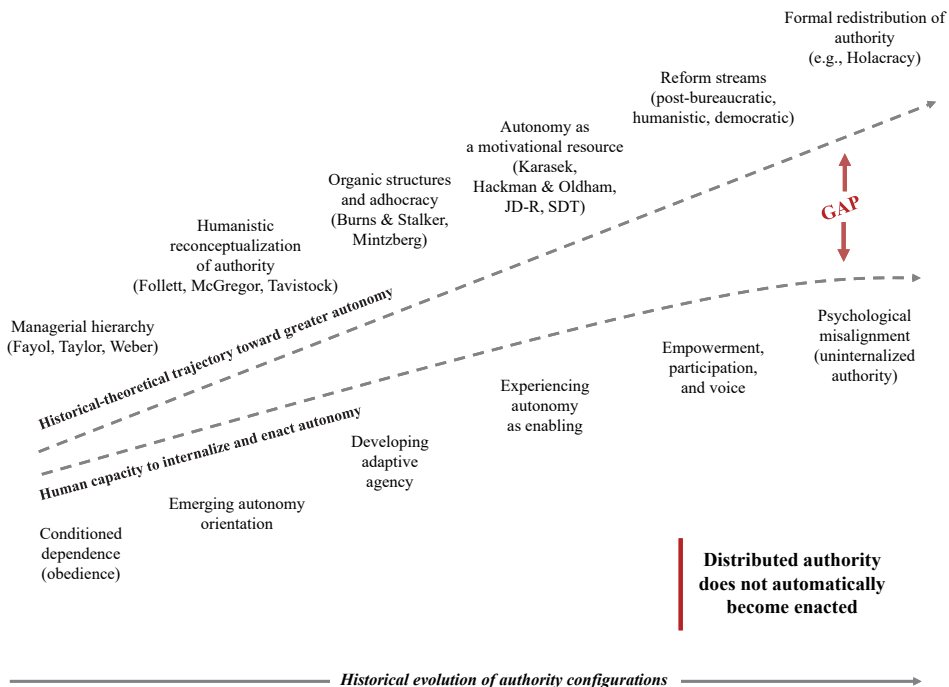


Figure 1. From managerial authority to distributed authority: An unresolved transition. Source: compiled by the author.

1.1. The institutionalization of managerial hierarchy

The rise of industrial modernity institutionalized managerial hierarchy as the dominant coordination mechanism of large-scale organizing. Early management thought developed along partially distinct but complementary lines: Taylor (1911) and Fayol (1916/1949) articulated principles of industrial and administrative

management focused on efficiency and control in production systems, while Weber (1947) theorized bureaucracy as a rational system of vertically differentiated authority, formalized roles, and clear reporting lines.

Inspired by economic principles of specialization (Smith, 1776/2007), these models separated planning from execution and centralized decision-making within defined levels of responsibility. Complementing these structural accounts, Simon (1947) provided a cognitive foundation for hierarchy, arguing that organizations mitigate bounded rationality by structuring decision premises and channeling authority through hierarchical layers. Chandler (1977) later described managerial hierarchy as the “visible hand” coordinating increasingly complex enterprises. Far from being an arbitrary imposition, this model proved remarkably effective in enabling large-scale coordination, economic growth, and administrative reliability. Over time, it became institutionalized as both efficient and necessary, embedding the taken-for-granted assumption that authority must ultimately converge at the top.

1.2. From managerial authority to autonomy-supportive forms of organizing

Even as managerial hierarchy consolidated its dominance, scholars began to explore its human and relational limits. Mary Parker Follett advanced a relational conception of authority grounded in “power with” rather than “power over,” arguing that authority should attach to function rather than rank in a hierarchy (Follett, 1933/2013). In doing so, she articulated an alternative understanding of authority as situational, relational, and collaborative rather than inherently vertical. Subsequently, the Human Relations movement independently shifted attention from formal authority to underlying managerial assumptions, with McGregor (1960) challenging the view that workers required strict oversight and proposing instead that individuals are capable of self-direction under appropriate conditions. Tavistock’s socio-technical research provided complementary structural evidence, demonstrating that work systems preserving autonomous, self-regulating groups supported both effective performance and psychological well-being (Trist & Bamforth, 1951). Burns and Stalker (1961) provided one of the earliest structural articulations of less-hierarchical organizing through their distinction between mechanistic and organic systems, demonstrating that under conditions of environmental change, authority shifts from hierarchical position to expertise-based, networked coordination, and individuals assume broader responsibility for organizational adaptation. Extending this line of inquiry, Mintzberg (1979) incorporated organic structure into his structural typology and formalized adhocracy as a distinct organizational configuration exhibiting these organic characteristics. Together, these developments laid important conceptual foundations for later theoretical work that more explicitly formalized autonomy as a central feature of organizing.

Karasek's (1979) Demand-Control model first conceptualized autonomy – framed as decision latitude – as a critical resource that buffers the adverse effects of job demands on strain and well-being. Hackman and Oldham's (1980) Job Characteristics Model similarly positioned autonomy as a core job design feature that fosters experienced responsibility and intrinsic motivation. The Job Demands-Resources model further embedded autonomy within a broader resource architecture, conceptualizing it as a key job resource that enhances engagement and buffers strain (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

Extending these autonomy-centered perspectives, the empowerment movement of the late 1980s and 1990s shifted attention from structural discretion to employees' subjective experience of power. Psychological empowerment was conceptualized as a cognitive state characterized by meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact (Spreitzer, 1996; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). This marked an important move from formal delegation to experienced agency, although empowerment frameworks largely remained embedded within hierarchical systems in which authority is ultimately granted – and potentially withdrawn – by management. Self-Determination Theory deepened the psychological grounding of autonomy by conceptualizing it not merely as a design feature or resource, but as a basic psychological need essential for intrinsic motivation, well-being, and growth (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Although these traditions conceptualize autonomy in different ways, they collectively demonstrate the growing centrality of autonomy in theories of work and organizing. In job design perspectives, autonomy is primarily understood as a structural feature of work, referring to the degree of discretion, decision latitude, and freedom individuals have in carrying out their tasks. In empowerment and self-determination perspectives, the focus shifts more explicitly toward the subjective and motivational experience of autonomy, including feelings of volition, ownership, and self-endorsement. The purpose here is therefore not to collapse these meanings into a single construct, but to trace a broader historical movement through which autonomy has become increasingly prominent as both a structural condition and a psychological experience in organizational scholarship. Taken together, these traditions prepared the ground for more radical forms of distributed authority.

At the same time, broader economic transformations reinforced these theoretical developments. As Drucker (1988) argued, the rise of knowledge work rendered centralized supervision increasingly untenable, as expertise became distributed and decision-making authority needed to reside closer to the work itself. Together, these perspectives reframed employees as capable, autonomously motivated, and increasingly indispensable contributors – yet largely sought to recalibrate and humanize hierarchy rather than fundamentally replace it.

1.3. From less-hierarchical reform streams to radical redistribution of authority

Against this broader theoretical backdrop, research on alternatives to concentrated managerial authority coalesced into several reform streams. As Lee and Edmondson (2017) note, scholarship on less-hierarchical organizing has evolved primarily along three broad trajectories: post-bureaucratic organizations, humanistic management, and organizational democracy. The post-bureaucratic stream emphasizes flexibility and adaptive coordination in dynamic environments, exemplified by Mintzberg's (1979) concept of adhocracy. The humanistic management stream emphasizes dignity, empowerment, and intrinsic motivation, seeking to broaden employee voice and autonomy, as exemplified by Hamel and Zanini's (2020) Humanocracy, which advocates organizations that unlock initiative and human potential. The organizational democracy stream, in turn, invokes principles of shared governance and, in some cases, collective ownership, as illustrated by cooperative enterprises such as Mondragón (Forcadell, 2005).

In parallel, critical management scholarship interrogated the ideological foundations and taken-for-granted legitimacy of managerial authority (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992) and examined the subtle mechanisms through which control operates via identity regulation and normative governance (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). While rarely proposing alternative structural designs, this body of work deepened understanding of how power is reproduced and internalized within organizational life, particularly through critical management studies' sustained attention to subjectivity, discourse, control, and resistance (Spicer & Alvesson, 2025).

Despite their differences, these approaches largely operate through incremental decentralization – flattening hierarchies, expanding participation, redistributing voice, or humanizing managerial authority – while managerial authority often remains a structural anchor. Research on organizational design and structure similarly shows that decentralization has historically evolved through successive structural disruptions, each redistributing decision-making authority away from centralized bureaucratic control while stopping short of fully eliminating hierarchical authority (Reineke et al., 2025). As a result, decentralization has often functioned as a modification of hierarchical authority rather than its complete structural replacement.

More recent reform-oriented critiques and experiments have given rise to more explicit attempts to eliminate the manager-subordinate reporting relationship as the core organizing principle of hierarchy. Laloux (2014), synthesizing observations from pioneering organizations and drawing on developmental and organizational theory, proposed that a new organizational model may be emerging alongside what he termed the “Evolutionary-Teal” stage of consciousness. Based on case studies of pioneering organizations, he identified three defining breakthroughs – self-management, wholeness, and evolutionary purpose – that together challenge the dominance of managerial hierarchy. Rather than merely flattening structures or expanding participation, the Teal framework envisions organizations

in which authority is distributed across roles and embedded in processes rather than concentrated in managerial positions.

At the same time, this broader stream of thought has been subject to critical scrutiny within organization design scholarship. Foss and Klein (2022), for example, argue that such “bossless company narratives” often underestimate the fundamental coordination and cooperation problems that hierarchical structures help resolve, as well as the role of contingencies such as knowledge characteristics and interdependencies in shaping effective organizational design. Rather than dismissing radical decentralization altogether, their critique highlights the conditions under which distributed authority may be more or less viable, drawing attention to the coordination challenges that any non-hierarchical system must address. In this sense, their work can be seen as refining and strengthening the theoretical foundations of self-managing forms of organizing by specifying the constraints and contingencies within which such systems must operate. Concurrently, developments within the field of less-hierarchical organizing have given rise to approaches that, implicitly or explicitly, exhibit sensitivity to similar coordination challenges through more formally specified governance structures and decision-making processes.

Within this broader trajectory, Brian Robertson (2015) articulated Holacracy as a constitution-based governance system that formalizes radical decentralization by replacing the manager-subordinate reporting relationship with explicitly defined roles, accountabilities, and distributed authority. Through its constitutional framework (Holacracy Constitution, n.d.), Holacracy embeds distributed authority in formal governance and tactical processes, making the redistribution of authority not merely cultural or aspirational but structurally specified and replicable. The present dissertation builds on this particular structural configuration, examining Holacracy as a concrete instantiation of radical authority redistribution and investigating the conditions under which formally redistributed authority becomes enacted in practice following the elimination of hierarchical reporting relationships.

2. THE THREE STUDIES

3. DISCUSSION AND CONTRIBUTIONS

3.1. Theoretical contributions and cross-study synthesis

Responding to calls for greater theoretical integration across fragmented perspectives on new organizational forms (Bremer, 2026; Palmer et al., 2007) and to the persistent under-theorization of radical decentralization (Lee & Edmondson, 2017), this dissertation develops a theoretically integrative, multi-level explanatory account of how distributed authority becomes enacted in practice. Building on the conceptual architecture and empirical findings presented above, it advances explanatory and process theorizing (Cornelissen et al., 2021) by specifying the underlying mechanisms through which distributed authority unfolds over time and gives rise to both human flourishing and organizational antifragility. In addition, it addresses a central puzzle in the literature on distributed authority (e.g., Lee & Edmondson, 2017): although authority can be formally redistributed, the conditions under which it becomes behaviorally enacted remain insufficiently understood. Against this backdrop, the dissertation reframes distributed authority not as an automatic consequence of structural redesign, but as a processual, human-centered accomplishment produced through cross-level interaction (Hitt et al., 2007; Klein et al., 1999).

The distributed tension-processing capacity, structural evolution, and antifragility

The structural analysis of Holacracy's antifragility reconceptualizes distributed authority not as a static allocation of decision rights but as a constitution-based governance architecture that enables continuous structural adaptation. The Holacracy constitution specifies rule-bound governance practices for processing tensions and iteratively redefining structural elements, embedding structural evolution within everyday organizational functioning. Drawing on Taleb's (2012) notion of antifragility, distributed authority is theorized as capable of benefiting from volatility through localized and continuous structural reconfiguration. By explicating the governance practices that generate endogenous structural evolution – rather than episodic top-down restructuring typical of traditional hierarchies – the study provides a structural explanation for how organizations may benefit from conditions of turbulence rather than merely endure them.

Within the broader literature on “new organizational forms,” the present antifragility study is most closely aligned with the economic and organizational design stream (Bremer, 2026), which examines how alternative configurations of decision-making authority and coordination mechanisms address the fundamental problems of organizing (Puranam et al., 2014). The antifragility study builds on a long-standing concern in the organizational design literature with achieving fit between organizational structures and the environments in which organizations operate (Burton et al., 2020). Classical contingency theories conceptualized organizational effectiveness as the alignment between structural

arrangements and environmental conditions such as the rate of change, the level of complexity, and the uncertainty organizations face in their operating environment (Burns & Stalker, 1961; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Mintzberg, 1979).

Subsequent developments in organizational design scholarship have refined this perspective by emphasizing that organizational effectiveness depends not only on structural configuration but also on the alignment between structure and coordination mechanisms (Burton & Obel, 2018). Underlying many of these perspectives is the insight that organizational structures are fundamentally mechanisms for processing information and coordinating interdependent activities. Galbraith (1973) argued that organizations must balance the information-processing demands generated by environmental uncertainty and task interdependence with their available information-processing capacity. As complexity increases, organizations can either reduce the need for information processing – for example by creating more autonomous units – or increase their information-processing capacity through mechanisms such as hierarchical oversight, lateral communication, and integrative structures (Galbraith, 1973; Tushman & Nadler, 1978). From this perspective, organizational structures evolve as organizations attempt to manage the informational demands created by dynamic environments and complex patterns of interdependence. More recent work similarly highlights that organizations continually adjust their structures in response to changing performance feedback and evolving environmental conditions (Joseph & Gaba, 2020).

The governance architecture of Holacracy examined in the antifragility study can be interpreted through this information-processing lens. In this view, Holacracy can be understood as a distributed sensing system, in which role holders function as organizational “nerve endings.” Rather than concentrating information-processing responsibilities primarily at the apex of the organization, Holacracy distributes information-processing capacity across the organization through a network of autonomous circles and roles. Role holders act as locally embedded sensors continuously detecting tensions as signals of misalignment between current reality and potential improvement. These signals are not merely reported upward but are processed locally through governance mechanisms that enable immediate structural adaptation. Each circle continuously senses operational tensions – defined as perceived gaps between current reality and potential improvement – and processes these tensions through structured governance practices that allow role holders to propose and implement modifications to roles, accountabilities, and coordination mechanisms. Through these processes, organizational members collectively engage in ongoing structural adjustment. In this sense, antifragility emerges not from robustness or redundancy alone, but from the system’s capacity to transform distributed sensing into continuous structural learning.

This distributed architecture expands the organization’s ability to process information by enabling role holders throughout the organization to detect emerging coordination challenges and initiate structural responses. Instead of relying primarily on hierarchical oversight to interpret environmental signals and

redesign structures, the organization mobilizes the distributed sensing and interpretive capacity of its role holders. Local circles function as autonomous units that continuously interpret signals from their operational environments and translate them into governance proposals aimed at improving the organization's functioning. Because these processes occur locally and continuously, they increase both the volume and the speed with which organizations can process information and adapt their structures to evolving coordination requirements.

This perspective challenges a long-standing assumption in organization design scholarship that environmental turbulence often necessitates greater centralization of decision-making authority (e.g., Foss & Klein, 2022). Classical arguments, often discussed under the threat rigidity hypothesis, suggest that when organizations face heightened uncertainty or threat, they tend to centralize authority and restrict information processing in order to maintain coherence and control (Staw et al., 1981). Research on decentralized organizing similarly shows that organizations frequently face pressures toward hierarchical recentralization when coordination challenges intensify or environmental uncertainty increases (Foss, 2003; Lee & Young-Hyman, 2026).

The antifragility study proposes, instead, that in dynamic environments distributed information-processing architectures may enhance organizational resilience by enabling decentralized units to respond quickly to emerging disruptions.

Research on structural empowerment has similarly shown that distributing decision-making authority across organizations can strengthen resilience by leveraging the knowledge and responsiveness of frontline employees (Van den Berg et al., 2022). Lee and Young-Hyman's (2026) analysis further suggests that organizations can sustain decentralized authority even under crisis conditions when temporary centralization is collectively authorized and enacted transparently through institutionalized governance rules. In such systems, the capacity to temporarily reallocate authority is itself embedded in the governing architecture, allowing organizations to respond to environmental shocks without undermining their underlying commitments to distributed authority.

The analysis presented in the antifragility study contributes to this debate by examining a governance system in which distributed authority is embedded within formal mechanisms for continuous structural evolution. Rather than conceptualizing decentralization as a static allocation of decision rights, the study analyzes Holacracy as a constitutional governance architecture that institutionalizes ongoing processes for revising roles, accountabilities, and decision authorities in response to emerging organizational tensions. Through these governance processes, disturbances and coordination challenges become triggers for structural adaptation rather than sources of organizational breakdown.

Moreover, the findings suggest that the durability and adaptive potential of self-managing organizations depend on the presence of institutionalized governance mechanisms that allow organizations to continually redesign their structures in order to maintain alignment between structure and coordination requirements. Such mechanisms may also enable organizations to selectively reconfigure authority structures, including forms of temporary hierarchical recentrali-

zation, when doing so better supports coordination and organizational purpose (Lee & Young-Hyman, 2026). What makes this governance architecture anti-fragile is that it institutionalizes a meta-adaptive mechanism through which disturbances and operational tensions systematically trigger structural learning. Tensions do not merely lead to immediate operational problem solving; they also activate governance processes that revise roles, accountabilities, and coordination structures. In that sense, the system is not merely capable of adapting to volatility; it is organized to learn from disturbances in ways that may improve its future adaptive capacity. When tensions and disruptions can repeatedly trigger such adaptive structural responses, decentralized systems may gradually strengthen through exposure to volatility, a dynamic consistent with Taleb's (2012) notion of antifragility.

Governance architecture, distributed authority, and the emergence of autonomous motivation

The self-determination study on human flourishing reconceptualizes constitution-based governance architecture as an autonomy-supportive context rather than merely a passive decentralization arrangement. Drawing on self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2017), the analysis specifies how governance practices that grant role-based decision authority, enable tension-processing, and encourage participatory voice satisfy basic psychological needs. By linking governance practices to need satisfaction, distributed authority is theorized as generating autonomous motivation, thereby fostering optimal functioning and psychological well-being. Autonomous motivation thus emerges not as a formal property of structure but as a psychologically realized state produced through constitution-based governance practices. Importantly, this perspective also suggests that governance architectures do not merely provide conditions for motivation but shape the extent to which individuals are able to actively engage with and transform those conditions in practice.

The self-determination study bridges two perspectives within the broader literature on “new organizational forms” (Bremer, 2026). On the one hand, it builds on the economic and organizational design stream by conceptualizing constitution-based governance as a structural configuration that redistributes decision authority and organizes coordination through formalized practices. On the other hand, it resonates with the critical and humanistic stream's concern with autonomy, subjectivity, and the conditions for individual and collective flourishing. These perspectives have largely developed in parallel: organizational design research has focused on how authority is structured and coordinated, while humanistic and critical perspectives have examined the experiential and normative consequences of autonomy-intensive forms of organizing. The present study connects these domains by theorizing governance architecture as the link between structure and motivation, showing how constitution-based governance architecture not only redistributes authority but also creates conditions under which

autonomous motivation can emerge through the satisfaction of basic psychological needs.

The self-determination study builds on a broad tradition in motivational psychology examining how work environments shape individuals' motivation, engagement, and well-being (Deci et al., 2017; Parker et al., 2017). Early humanistic perspectives emphasized individuals' intrinsic growth tendencies and the importance of enabling environments (Maslow, 1943). In management, this view was reflected in McGregor's (1960) Theory Y, portraying employees as inherently motivated and capable of self-direction. These ideas informed a shift toward work design as a key determinant of motivation.

The Job Characteristics Model (Hackman & Oldham, 1980) identified five core job attributes that enhance motivation by fostering key psychological states. Subsequent research demonstrated consistent links between job design, attitudes, well-being, and performance (Humphrey et al., 2007). Among these characteristics, autonomy has consistently emerged as a central predictor of intrinsic motivation and engagement.

The Job Demands-Resources framework conceptualizes motivation as arising from interactions between job demands and resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, 2016). Resources such as autonomy, competence, and social support foster engagement, while excessive demands contribute to strain and burnout. Complementing this, job crafting research emphasizes employees as active agents who shape their work to enhance meaning and motivation (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001).

At the psychological level, self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2017) provides one of the most comprehensive frameworks for explaining why certain work environments support motivation and well-being. Self-determination theory proposes that the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs – autonomy, competence, and relatedness – fosters autonomous motivation and optimal functioning (Gagné & Deci, 2005; Deci et al., 2017). A large body of research has demonstrated that satisfaction of these needs is systematically associated with employee motivation, well-being, and work performance across a wide range of organizational contexts (Van den Broeck et al., 2016). When individuals experience their work environment as supporting these needs, they are more likely to exhibit autonomous motivation, sustained engagement, and psychological flourishing. While this body of research has substantially advanced understanding of the psychological conditions that support motivation at work, much of this literature has focused primarily on leadership behaviors, HR practices, and job design interventions as mechanisms for supporting need satisfaction (Deci et al., 2017; Van den Broeck et al., 2016).

Research on work motivation has therefore largely examined how motivation can be cultivated through manager-led or organizationally designed interventions, including the characteristics of tasks and jobs (Hackman & Oldham, 1980), the availability of job resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), and the motivational effects of leadership practices and managerial climates (Deci et al., 2017; Gagné & Deci, 2005). While this body of research has substantially advanced under-

standing of how work design interventions and particularly leader autonomy support (Slemp et al., 2018) facilitate need satisfaction, it has largely overlooked the role of organizational governance architecture in shaping these motivational conditions, with recent reviews highlighting persistent gaps in multi-level and structural analyses within the self-determination theory literature (Gagné et al., 2026).

The present study contributes to this literature by bringing insights from organizational design into dialogue with motivational psychology. Specifically, the analysis shows how constitution-based governance systems such as Holacracy redistribute decision authority across roles in ways that create structural conditions supportive of the psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness identified by self-determination theory. In contrast to perspectives that treat motivation as primarily shaped by top-down design or leadership practices, the findings suggest that constitution-based governance systems enable role holders to actively reshape elements of their organizational context, including roles, accountabilities, and decision-making processes. Specifically, Holacracy institutionalizes a form of distributed authority in which role holders are formally empowered to modify the very structures that influence their need satisfaction. Rather than relying on managerial interventions to create autonomy-supportive conditions, the governance system embeds the capacity to continuously construct and reconstruct such conditions within the organizational architecture itself. In doing so, it extends self-determination theory into the domain of organizational governance by demonstrating how macro-level structural arrangements can enable micro-level psychological need satisfaction through ongoing participatory enactment.

This dynamic relationship between role holders and organizational structures resonates with structuration perspectives that view structures as continuously reproduced and modified through practice (Barley & Tolbert, 1997), as well as with research on enabling formalization, which highlights how formal organizational systems can empower employees to diagnose and improve the processes that structure their work (Adler & Borys, 1996). From an organizational design perspective, this also suggests that governance architectures can distribute not only decision rights over tasks but also the capacity to modify the rules and structures through which work is coordinated (Puranam et al., 2014). The distribution of authority therefore functions not only as a structural condition that supports need satisfaction but also as a generative mechanism through which role holders can continually reshape the organizational context locally, enabling motivation to emerge through ongoing, grassroots-level structural enactment rather than primarily through top-down design.

Authority internalization and unlearning the learned helplessness

The empirical study extends and integrates the two preceding theoretical perspectives by foregrounding a dimension that is often implicitly assumed but

rarely theorized explicitly: the human capacity to internalize and enact distributed authority. The study introduces unlearning the learned helplessness as the authority-internalization mechanism explaining the uneven realization of distributed authority in practice. Drawing on learned helplessness theory (Maier & Seligman, 1976, 2016), the findings demonstrate that prolonged exposure to hierarchical authority fosters patterns of deference, hesitation, and responsibility deflection that persist beyond formal structural redistribution. Learned helplessness operates as a residual imprint that inhibits the recognition, internalization, and enactment of authority. From this perspective, the transition to distributed authority is not merely a structural redesign but a psychological transformation, in which individuals must gradually shift from externally guided action to self-authorized agency.

The learned helplessness study can be situated within the critical management stream of the broader scholarship on distributed authority, which examines how autonomy-intensive forms of organizing may give rise to new and often subtle forms of control and domination (Bremer, 2026). In recent years, a growing and increasingly influential body of research – drawing on critical, interpretive, and post-structuralist traditions concerned with symbolic power, discourse, and the formation of subjectivity (e.g., Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; De Ridder & Claeyé, 2026; De Ridder & Jammaers, 2026; Daudigeos et al., 2021; Picard & Islam, 2020) – has developed a nuanced and empirically grounded critique of autonomy-intensive forms of organizing. This work has been particularly important in moving beyond idealized accounts of self-management by demonstrating how power, control, and exclusion are reconfigured rather than eliminated in the absence of formal hierarchy.

Building on this perspective, recent critical scholarship has increasingly challenged the assumption that autonomy and self-management are inherently emancipatory, suggesting instead that such arrangements can paradoxically become vehicles for subtle and often hidden forms of domination in practice (De Ridder & Jammaers, 2026). Research on alternative forms of work organization demonstrates how, in the absence of formal hierarchy, control is not eliminated but reconfigured into peer-driven and collectively enacted forms of socio-normative control, whereby shared expectations and routines regulate behavior through social rather than managerial enforcement (De Ridder & Claeyé, 2026). Critical analyses of neo-participative management further suggest that autonomy, participation, and critique may themselves become integrated into systems of control. The notion of elusive domination highlights how empowerment discourses can be incorporated into organizational functioning, thereby neutralizing their transformative potential and rendering domination more difficult to contest (Daudigeos et al., 2021). Similarly, research on liberating leadership points to the ambivalent effects of removing formal authority, showing how the removal of formal authority through liberating leadership practices may intensify normative pressures, emotional demands, and expectations of self-realization, as freedom itself becomes a source of obligation, while simultaneously exposing individuals to new forms of strain and exclusion (Picard & Islam, 2020). Across these

perspectives, a common insight emerges: rather than disappearing, control becomes more socially embedded and psychologically diffuse.

Taken together, this body of work offers a theoretically and empirically rich account of the lived realities of self-managing organizations by foregrounding relational, affective, and power-laden dynamics. At the same time, it adopts a diagnostic orientation that prioritizes the identification of power asymmetries, exclusions, and unintended consequences, thereby shaping what becomes most visible in the analysis.

While this perspective provides compelling evidence that autonomy can become normatively charged and socially enforced, the present thesis offers a complementary explanation of when and why such dynamics emerge. The learned helplessness study extends this stream by moving beyond its predominantly discursive and political focus, offering instead a processual, micro-level account of how distributed authority becomes psychologically internalized – or remains unenacted. Specifically, it argues that the experience of autonomy as a normative demand is not a property of autonomy itself, nor of its mere provision, but of the context in which it is enacted. Such dynamics arise when there is a misalignment between the institutional provision of self-direction and individuals' historically shaped capacity to enact it in practice. Prolonged exposure to hierarchical control conditions individuals to rely on external authority (Deci & Flaste, 1995), resulting in cognitive, motivational, and emotional barriers to self-directed action even when formal authority is redistributed. In such contexts, autonomy may be experienced not as a resource but as a demand (Dettmers & Bredehöft, 2020; Zolg & Herbig, 2023), precisely because individuals have not yet internalized the capacity for agentic action.

From this perspective, the anxiety and discomfort highlighted in critical accounts can be understood not as intrinsic to autonomy itself, nor as a consequence of its normative imposition, but as the psychological consequence of removing managerial hierarchy that previously contained uncertainty, responsibility, and their associated anxieties (Menzies, 1960). In this sense, the erosion of hierarchical containment may intensify the very affective dynamics identified in prior research. In other words, autonomy does not generate anxiety *per se*; rather, it reveals and redistributes anxieties that hierarchical arrangements had previously absorbed.

Seen in this light, critical perspectives tend to theorize the very processes through which autonomy and distributed authority are enacted – such as participation, empowerment, and the removal of hierarchy – as sites where new forms of control and domination emerge. By focusing primarily on how autonomy may become experienced as burdensome, exclusionary, or anxiety-inducing, they may offer a systematically asymmetrical account in which the conditions under which autonomy fails are foregrounded, while the conditions under which it enables agency, development, and well-being remain comparatively underexplored (Spicer et al., 2009, 2016).

The present thesis does not dispute the presence of such tensions but seeks to complement these perspectives by examining the processes through which

autonomy is enacted, internalized, and sustained over time. It shows that the experience of autonomy as a normative demand is not an inherent property of autonomy, but emerges from a misalignment between newly granted authority and individuals' historically shaped reliance on external regulation and authority, resulting in cognitive, motivational, and emotional barriers to self-directed action. This dynamic also resonates with emerging research emphasizing the ongoing need to unlearn entrenched hierarchical patterns in democratic organizing (Powell & Bartels, 2026), suggesting that the persistence of such patterns reflects not only structural conditions but also deeper forms of psychological conditioning.

At the same time, the learned helplessness study responds to a broader limitation in critical management studies, which has been noted for its strong emphasis on critique and problematization while remaining comparatively underdeveloped in engaging with practical interventions and viable organizational alternatives (e.g., Spicer & Alvesson, 2025; Spicer et al., 2009, 2016). Importantly, the contribution of this study is not limited to extending critique but lies in developing a psychologically grounded account of how such conditions may be transformed through processes of internalization and the gradual development of agentic capacity.

In this sense, the question is not whether autonomy is emancipatory or constraining, but under what conditions it can be enacted without giving rise to new forms of control, and how individuals come to develop the capacity to embrace it.

Cross-study synthesis: A recursive model of distributed authority enactment

The recursive model depicted in Figure 2 integrates the three studies into a processual account of how distributed authority emerges and is sustained over time. This process is enacted through constitution-based governance practices, which simultaneously generate conditions for adaptive structural evolution and autonomous motivation. Yet these structural and motivational potentials do not automatically translate into enacted distributed authority and self-organization. As demonstrated in the learned helplessness study, their realization depends on authority internalization – a developmental process that unfolds under three inductively derived human-centered boundary conditions: clarity of role boundaries and responsibilities, purpose-driven proactive behavior, and complex social interaction. In line with the learned helplessness study, these boundary conditions are conceptualized not as external feasibility constraints but as conditions of psychological viability – cognitive, motivational, and socio-emotional prerequisites that enable individuals to acknowledge, internalize, and enact authority in the absence of hierarchical control.

Taken together, the three studies suggest that constitution-based governance architecture provides the structural backbone of distributed authority, autonomy-supportive dynamics constitute its motivational pathway, and authority internalization represents the psychological mechanism through which distributed

authority becomes enacted and sustained in practice. Figure 2 summarizes this integrative model.

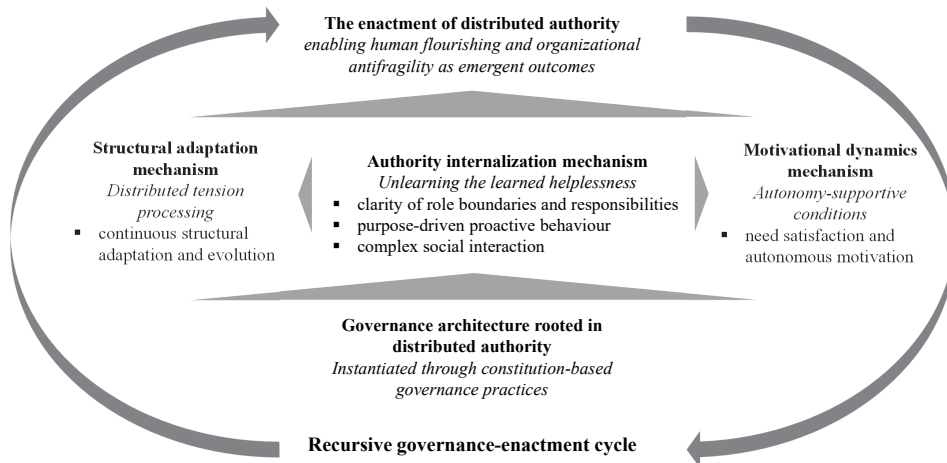


Figure 2. A recursive model of distributed authority enactment through structural, motivational, and authority-internalization mechanisms. Source: compiled by the author.

At the structural level, constitution-based governance architecture enables adaptive structural evolution by institutionalizing distributed tension processing. By enabling role holders to surface, articulate, and resolve tensions through modifications of roles and circle structures, governance practices render organizational design continuously responsive to emerging conditions. Rather than relying on episodic top-down restructuring, structural adaptation occurs locally and iteratively as tensions are processed. This distributed process of structural refinement generates organizational antifragility – that is, the capacity of the organization to continually strengthen and evolve through exposure to volatility and change (Taleb, 2012).

At the motivational level, this same governance architecture creates an autonomy-supportive context when interpreted through the lens of self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2017). By distributing decision authority to roles, enabling individuals to initiate and process tensions, and clarifying role purposes and accountabilities, governance practices support the satisfaction of the basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. This need satisfaction fosters autonomous motivation and supports human flourishing (Gagné & Deci, 2005).

Yet structural and motivational potentials remain constitutionally embedded possibilities unless they are psychologically internalized and enacted by role holders. Authority internalization represents the psychological enabling mechanism through which individuals come to recognize, endorse, and enact their

formally granted authority. Without this psychological shift, the structural and motivational potentials of distributed authority remain dormant, and organizations risk reverting to informal hierarchy despite formal decentralization (Diefenbach & Sillince, 2011). Authority internalization therefore emerges as the key mechanism linking structural possibility and motivational energization with enacted self-organization.

Through the gradual unlearning of hierarchical dependency, governance practices shift from being merely formally specified to being behaviorally enacted. Once enacted, these practices enable ongoing structural adaptation and reinforce autonomous motivation, transforming constitutionally embedded potentials into realized organizational dynamics. Through repeated cycles, individuals increasingly exercise role-based authority, stabilizing distributed authority as a lived organizational reality. This recursive process generates a self-reinforcing feedback loop whereby enacted distributed authority, in turn, reproduces and reinforces the underlying governance architecture. The model thus conceptualizes distributed authority not as a static structural condition but as a continuously unfolding organizational process emerging from the interaction between governance practices, motivational dynamics, and psychological internalization.

This recursive process is fundamentally multilevel in nature, involving the interaction of various mechanisms operating at analytically distinct levels of organizational reality (Klein et al., 1994). Governance practices operate at the organizational level as institutionalized structural processes, while authority internalization unfolds at the individual level as a psychological process enabling behavioral enactment. Structural redistribution of authority creates the institutional conditions for enacted distributed authority, yet its realization depends on individual-level authority internalization. Conversely, repeated enactment of role-based authority stabilizes and reproduces distributed authority as an organizational-level structural reality. Organizational antifragility and human flourishing thus emerge as outcomes of this recursive enactment process rather than as automatic consequences of formal authority redistribution.

Taken together, this integrative account also clarifies the dissertation's scholarly and practical utility, and thereby its broader theoretical scope (Corley & Gioia, 2011). From a scholarly standpoint, it provides conceptual tools for analyzing radical distribution of authority as an organizing configuration with identifiable structural, motivational, and authority-internalization mechanisms. From a practical standpoint, the model suggests that the viability of self-managing forms of organizing cannot be assessed only in terms of formal governance design. It also depends on whether such designs generate adaptive capacity, support autonomous motivation, and enable individuals to internalize and enact their role-based authority. In this sense, the dissertation's contribution lies not only in its originality, but also in its scope: it seeks to advance theoretical understanding while illuminating conditions of practical relevance for organizations attempting to distribute authority. The practical implications of this argument are developed in the following section.

3.2. Practical implications: Designing for authority internalization

Holacracy's constitution (Holacracy Constitution, n.d.) formally distributes authority, yet the empirical findings of this dissertation demonstrate that distributed authority becomes viable only when role holders internalize and enact that authority in everyday practice. The central practical implication is therefore how to support the psychological transition required for authority internalization. This means that implementation must be approached not merely as structural reform, but as developmental reconditioning.

Stabilizing cognitive recognition through role clarity

Authority internalization begins with cognitive recognition of one's role-based authority. This recognition depends on clear role purpose and accountabilities that anchor decision authority within defined role boundaries (e.g., Lee, 2024). Organizations implementing distributed authority should therefore prioritize the continuous clarification and stabilization of role purpose and accountabilities. Role definitions should be treated as living artifacts that are regularly updated, and informal authority creep should be surfaced and processed explicitly as a governance tension.

Cultivating purpose-driven, proactive agency

Authority internalization requires that individuals actively exercise their role-based authority. Hierarchical conditioning often suppresses initiative and fosters hesitation and responsibility deflection (Ashforth, 1990; Carlson & Kacmar, 1994; Martinko & Gardner, 1982). Organizations implementing distributed authority should therefore create repeated, low-risk opportunities for role holders to voice tensions, make decisions, and interpret role purpose as actionable guidance.

Former managers play a particularly important role in stabilizing this shift. Selective overriding or episodic managerial intervention (e.g., Foss, 2003) can undermine the credibility of distributed authority by signaling that autonomy remains conditional. Protecting enacted authority from discretionary managerial re-entry into decision-making is therefore essential.

At the same time, proactive agency requires an environment in which individuals feel safe to experiment and make mistakes. Psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999, 2019) enables individuals new to distributed authority to gradually build confidence in exercising their roles. When hesitation or informal dominance emerges, these dynamics should be surfaced and processed through governance mechanisms, reinforcing collective accountability for distributed authority.

Developing competence in complex social interaction

Distributed authority shifts coordination from hierarchical supervision to peer-based interaction among role holders (Fjeldstad et al., 2012). Authority inter-

nalization therefore depends not only on individual initiative but also on the ability to navigate complex social interaction (Powell & Bartels, 2026), including emotional regulation under uncertainty, tolerance for ambiguity, constructive conflict engagement, and collective knowledge creation. Autonomy can generate anxiety and fear (Kantola & Kinnunen, 2024), particularly for individuals transitioning from hierarchical environments. Successful implementation of constitution-based distributed authority systems therefore requires deliberate social support for authority internalization as a developmental process. In practice, this means normalizing such discomfort as part of developmental change and providing forums where tensions can be surfaced and processed without sanction.

3.3. Limitations and future research

A natural limitation of this dissertation lies in *the extent to which its proposed theoretical mechanisms and explanatory models have been empirically validated across diverse organizational contexts*. Two of the three constituent studies are conceptual in nature, advancing theoretically grounded explanations for the structural and motivational dynamics underlying distributed authority. Specifically, the application of self-determination theory provides a motivational account of how distributed authority may facilitate the need satisfaction and autonomous motivation, while the antifragility perspective conceptualizes distributed authority as a structural adaptation mechanism enabling organizations to respond constructively to environmental volatility. Although these conceptual contributions offer theoretically coherent and integrative explanations, they remain propositions that require systematic empirical examination. The learned helplessness study, while empirically grounded, relies on an exploratory, context-specific ethnographic case of Holacracy adoption within a single organizational setting. The dissertation's findings should therefore be understood as theoretically generative rather than definitively generalizable, consistent with theory-building research that advances explanatory insight and conceptual mechanisms while requiring further empirical validation across contexts (Corley & Gioia, 2011). While ethnographic methods provide uniquely rich insight into lived organizational dynamics and enable the identification of previously unrecognized psychological processes, the transferability of these findings across different organizational forms, industries, and cultural contexts remains an open empirical question. The demanding aspects of authority internalization are likely to be particularly pronounced among individuals historically conditioned into hierarchical dependency in high power-distance contexts (Sagie & Aycan, 2003), for whom the sudden transfer of decision authority may impose disproportionately high cognitive and psychological demands. Research shows that deeper forms of job autonomy – particularly work methods and decision-making autonomy – entail not only increased discretion but also heightened cognitive and self-regulatory demands, as individuals must actively structure and coordinate their own

work (Dettmers & Bredehöft, 2020; Zolg & Herbig, 2023). Future research should therefore seek to empirically examine and refine the mechanisms proposed in this dissertation across a broader range of organizational settings, employing complementary methodological approaches – including longitudinal, comparative, and quantitative designs – to assess the robustness, boundary conditions, and generalizability of the findings (Edmondson & McManus, 2007).

Another limitation of this dissertation concerns its exclusive empirical and conceptual focus on Holacracy (Robertson, 2015) as the organizational instantiation through which distributed authority is examined. While Holacracy represents one of the most fully specified frameworks for distributing authority, it constitutes *only one instantiation within a broader landscape of self-managing organizational forms*. A growing number of organizations have developed alternative approaches to distributing authority that differ in their structural mechanisms, coordination processes, and underlying design principles. For example, Morning Star coordinates work through peer-negotiated Colleague Letters of Understanding rather than managerial supervision (Hamel, 2011); Valve enables employees to self-select projects and exercise autonomous initiative without formal reporting relationships (Puranam & Håkonsson, 2015); and Buurtzorg relies on small, autonomous teams of healthcare professionals operating without traditional managerial hierarchy (Martela & Nandram, 2025). These examples demonstrate that distributed authority can emerge through multiple structural pathways, each with distinct coordination mechanisms and developmental trajectories. Consequently, while Holacracy provides a uniquely comprehensive and analytically tractable case through which to examine the psychological and structural dynamics of distributed authority, the findings of this dissertation may not capture the variation that exists across other forms of distributed authority. Future research should therefore adopt a comparative perspective, examining the similarities and differences between Holacracy and other self-managing organizational forms in order to identify which mechanisms generalize across contexts and which remain specific to particular institutional and structural configurations. Such comparative inquiry would contribute to a more comprehensive and theoretically robust understanding of distributed authority as a broader organizational phenomenon.

Beyond unlearning the learned helplessness, the internalization and enactment of distributed authority likely involve additional psychological processes that warrant further investigation. Prior research has identified *several mechanisms through which individuals come to assume greater agency and responsibility in organizational contexts*. For example, psychological empowerment theory conceptualizes empowerment as a cognitive state characterized by experienced meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact (Spreitzer, 1996), which may facilitate individuals' willingness to exercise newly granted authority. Identity-based perspectives suggest that transitions into new role configurations often require identity reconstruction, as individuals experiment with and gradually internalize new role identities (Ibarra, 1999). Sensemaking theory further emphasizes how individuals actively interpret and reinterpret their roles and

responsibilities when confronted with novel or ambiguous situations, shaping their capacity for autonomous action (Weick, 1995). Additionally, psychological safety has been shown to create interpersonal conditions that enable individuals to engage in risk-taking behaviors and exercise initiative without fear of negative consequences (Edmondson, 1999, 2019). These mechanisms may interact with, reinforce, or condition the process of unlearning the learned helplessness identified in this dissertation. Future research could examine how empowerment, identity reconstruction, and sensemaking processes interact with learned helplessness to shape the uneven realization of distributed authority. Such work would further refine understanding of how structural redistribution of authority becomes psychologically internalized and behaviorally enacted over time.

A further limitation of the dissertation concerns the scope of empirical extrapolation. While the findings illuminate the psychological mechanisms through which individuals internalize and subsequently unlearn hierarchical authority within the specific context of a transition to distributed authority, the study does not systematically examine *the broader implications of hierarchical conditioning across conventional organizational settings*. The empirical context, by removing formal managerial authority, rendered visible patterns of hesitation, approval-seeking, and responsibility deflection that often remain obscured within functioning hierarchies. These observations suggest that hierarchical authority may operate not only as a structural coordination mechanism but also as a formative influence shaping individuals' sense of agency and permissible action. This interpretation aligns with Foucauldian analyses of modern institutions, which emphasize how systems of normalization, hierarchical judgment, and internalized self-regulation produce disciplined subjects who align their conduct with institutional expectations (Foucault, 1977). Similarly, Knights and Willmott (1989) argue that organizational power operates not merely through direct supervision but through the construction of self-regulating identities (a process of subjectification and subjugation) that align individual conduct with institutional expectations. However, the extent to which such internalized patterns reflect a general feature of contemporary organizational life, rather than a context-specific transitional phenomenon, remains beyond the empirical scope of the present dissertation. Future research is therefore needed to examine more systematically how prolonged exposure to hierarchical authority shapes individual agency across diverse organizational contexts.

The findings of this dissertation also illustrate the generativity of the proposed perspective, as the lens of learned helplessness opens new avenues for inquiry in adjacent research streams such as *organizational change* and management innovation. Research on organizational change has traditionally emphasized employee reactions to change – particularly resistance – as a key factor shaping the success of change initiatives (Oreg et al., 2011). More recent research, however, highlights that employee responses extend beyond resistance to encompass a fragmented set of cognitive, emotional, relational, and learning-related processes (Kanitz et al., 2026). While these perspectives have largely developed in parallel, the findings of this dissertation suggest that they may, in part, reflect different

manifestations of a more fundamental underlying dynamic; namely, the degree to which individuals have internalized authority and experience themselves as capable of acting upon it. From this perspective, responses such as disengagement, compliance without ownership, ambivalence, or even passive forms of resistance may not be independent phenomena, but expressions of learned passivity shaped by prior hierarchical authority relations. In such contexts, the challenge of organizational change may lie less in overcoming resistance and more in enabling individuals to internalize authority and enact agency, thereby shifting attention from discrete attitudinal reactions to the deeper conditions that make pro-change action possible.

A related research stream that may benefit from this perspective is the literature on *management innovation*. Prior research has identified a range of structural and organizational drivers of management innovation, including leadership behaviors, organizational learning, and knowledge management (Khosravi et al., 2019). However, this literature tends to focus on structural and organizational antecedents while paying relatively limited attention to the psychological conditions that enable individuals to enact new managerial practices. The findings of this dissertation suggest that such agency cannot be taken for granted in organizational contexts shaped by hierarchical authority relations, pointing to learned helplessness as a potential psychological boundary condition influencing the emergence of management innovation.

Building on this dissertation, another promising avenue for future research lies also at *the intersection of self-managing organizations and artificial intelligence*. Rather than viewing AI as a production technology that substitutes human labor, emerging work conceptualizes it as a coordination technology that enhances collective intelligence (Woolley, 2026) and as a relational organizing capability arising through human-algorithm interaction (Stelmaszak et al., 2026). Integrating these perspectives suggests that AI may help address a core challenge of self-managing systems – sustaining coordination without hierarchy – by functioning as a connective infrastructure for distributed sensemaking and alignment. Emerging research provides initial evidence that human-algorithmic coordination through collaborative digital technologies can reduce reliance on managerial supervision while strengthening lateral coordination, thereby enabling more decentralized and self-managing forms of organizing (Gulati et al., 2026). Future research should therefore examine how human-algorithm relations could become embedded in governance practices and influence the enactment of distributed authority over time. Building on the present work, this intersection constitutes a promising direction for the continued development of the research program advanced in this dissertation.

SUMMARY IN ESTONIAN

Inimese optimaalse toimimise ja organisatsioonilise antifragiilsuse võimaldamine õpitud abituse ümberõppimise kaudu isejuhtivates organisatsioonides

Probleemipüstitus

Viimastel aastatel on järjest enam tähelepanu pööratud vähemhierarhilistele ja isejuhtivatele organisatsioonidele kui võimalikule alternatiivile traditsioonilistele hierarhilistele juhtimismudelitele (Bremer, 2026; Lee & Edmondson, 2017). Empiirilised uuringud on näidanud, et autonoomiat toetavad organisatsioonilised praktikad on seotud kõrgema töösoorituse, innovatsioonivõime, suurema tööalase heaolu ning väiksema kurnatusega (Seibert et al., 2011; Van den Broeck et al., 2016). Samal ajal viitavad uuringud sellele, et kuigi hierarhia võib teatud tingimustel toetada otsustamist, koordineerimist ja vastutuse selgust, võivad tugevalt kihistunud võimuhierarhiad suurendada meeskonnasisesid konflikte ning pärsida koostööd ja motivatsiooni (Anderson & Brown, 2010; Greer et al., 2018). Sellest hoolimata on formaalne juhtimishierarhia jätkuvalt kaasaegsete organisatsioonide domineeriv organiseerumisvorm (Child, 2019; Rothschild-Whitt, 1979).

Senine teaduskirjandus on isejuhtivate organisatsioonide kujunemist käsitlenud peamiselt organisatsioonilise struktuuri ja formaalse otsustusõiguse ümberjaotamise küsimusena (Bremer, 2026; Lee & Edmondson, 2017). Käesolev väitekirj seab kahtluse alla, kas otsustusõiguse ümberjaotamise edukaks rakendumiseks piisab üksnes formaalsete struktuuride muutmisest. Seega keskendub väitekirj autonoomiat toetavatele organisatsioonilistele mehhanismidele ja kultuurile ning inimeste valmisolekule rollipõhist otsustusõigust sisemiselt omaks võtta ja seda praktikas rakendada (Dettmers & Bredehöft, 2020; Ryan & Deci, 2017; Zolg & Herbig, 2023).

Eesmärk

Käesoleva väitekirja peaeesmärk on töötada välja integreeritud mitmetasandiline seletusmudel, mis aitab mõista, kuidas rollipõhiselt jaotatud otsustusõigus muutub isejuhtivates organisatsioonides tegelikuks ja toimivaks praktikaks (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000; Van de Ven & Poole, 1995). Täpsemalt keskendub väitekirj sellele, kuidas holakraatia konstitutsioonipõhised juhtimispraktikad (Robertson, 2015), mis formaalselt jaotavad otsustusõiguse organisatsiooni rollitäitjate vahel, loovad eeldused isejuhtivuse kujunemiseks. Erinevalt käsitlustest, mis näevad jaotatud otsustusõigust üksnes organisatsioonilise struktuuri omadusena (Puranam et al., 2014), käsitleb käesolev uurimus seda dünaamilise protsessina, mis kujuneb organisatsioonilise disaini, inimeste motivatsiooni ja otsustusõiguse sisemise omaksvõtmise vastasmõjus.

Selle eesmärgi saavutamiseks püstitatakse väitekirjas neli omavahel seotud uurimisülesannet: (1) selgitada jaotatud otsustusõiguse struktuurseid mehhanisme organisatsioonilise kohanemisvõime ja antifragiilsuse kujunemisel (Taleb, 2012); (2) analüüsida selle mõju inimeste psühholoogiliste baasvajaduste rahuldamisele (Ryan & Deci, 2017); (3) uurida otsustusõiguse omaksvõtmise protsessi, mille kaudu inimesed vabanevad hierarhilise juhtimise käigus kujunenud õpitud abitusest ning õpivad neile antud otsustusõigust iseseisvalt rakendama (Maier & Seligman, 1976, 2016); ning (4) sünteesida need kolm vaatenurka ühtseks mitmetasandiliseks teoreetiliseks raamistikuks (Corley & Gioia, 2011; Whetten, 1989).

Metoodika ja teaduslik panus

Väitekirja koosneb kolmest omavahel seotud uurimusest, mis käsitlevad jaotatud otsustusõiguse rakendumist erinevatel analüüsitasanditel. Metoodiliselt ühendab väitekirja kontseptuaalse teooriaarenduse ja kvalitatiivse empiirilise uurimuse. Esimene uurimus on kontseptuaalne ümberkirjeldus ja seletuslik laiendus (Cornelissen et al., 2021), milles holakraatia konstitutsioonipõhist juhtimisarhitektuuri tõlgendatakse Puranami jt (2014) universaalsete organiseerimisprobleemide raamistiku, organisatsioonidisaini teooria (Burton et al., 2020; Galbraith, 1973) ja antifragiilsuse mõiste (Taleb, 2012) kaudu, et selgitada jaotatud otsustusõiguse seost organisatsioonilise kohanemisega. Teine uurimus rakendab kontseptuaalset teooriaintegratsiooni ja seletuslikku laiendust (Cornelissen et al., 2021), sidudes holakraatia jaotatud otsustusõiguse praktikad enesemääratlusteooriaga, et selgitada autonoomse motivatsiooni ja inimese optimaalse toimimise mehhanisme (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Kolmas uurimus on induktiivne empiiriline teooriaarendus, mis põhineb interpretatiivsel etnograafilisel tegevusuuringul ning kasutab põhjustatud teooria põhimõtteid (Charmaz, 2024) ja Gioia metoodikat (Gioia et al., 2013). Lähtudes õpitud abituse teooriast (Maier & Seligman, 1976, 2016), arendab see uurimus välja protsessimudeli selle kohta, kuidas inimesed neile formaalselt antud rollipõhise otsustusõiguse sisemiselt omaks võtavad ja praktikas rakendavad.

Väitekirja teaduslik uudsus seisneb nende kolme seletusliini ühendamises mitmetasandiliseks raamistikuks, mis käsitleb jaotatud otsustusõigust mitte staatilise struktuuriomadusena, vaid dünaamilise protsessina (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000; Van de Ven & Poole, 1995). Selle kaudu näitab väitekirja, kuidas jaotatud otsustusõigus kujuneb organisatsioonides toimivaks praktikaks läbi struktuursete, motivatsiooniliste ja otsustusõiguse sisemise omaksvõtmise mehhanismide.

Peamised tulemused ja nende süntees

Väitekirja organisatsioonilist antifragiilsust käsitlev uurimus analüüsib jaotatud otsustusõigust organisatsioonilise disaini vaatenurgast ning selgitab, kuidas holakraatia konstitutsioonipõhine juhtimismudel aitab organisatsioonidel muutuvate oludega kohaneda. Tuginedes Puranami jt (2014) universaalsete organiseerimis-

probleemide raamistikule ja Talebi (2012) antifragiilsuse kontseptsioonile, toob uurimus välja, kuidas rollipõhine otsustusõigus ja pingete pidev lokaalne läbivõtamine loovad mehhanismi, mille kaudu organisatsioon saab ebakindluse ja muutustega kokkupuutest õppida, kohaneda ning vastupidavamaks muutuda.

Väitekirja organisatsiooni motivatsioonilist keskkonda käsitlev uurimus lähtub enesemääratlusteooriast (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2017) ning uurib, kuidas holakraatia konstitutsioonipõhine juhtimismudel mõjutab inimeste psühholoogiliste baasvajaduste rahuldamist. Uurimuse tulemused viitavad sellele, et holakraatia juhtimispraktikad kujundavad organisatsioonilise keskkonna, mis toetab autonoomia, kompetentsuse ja seotuse kogemist ning aitab seeläbi kaasa inimeste sisemisele motivatsioonile ja optimaalsele toimimisele.

Väitekirja otsustusõiguse omaksvõtmise protsessi käsitlev uurimus keskendub küsimusele, miks formaalselt jaotatud otsustusõigus praktikas sageli ei realiseeru. Tuginedes õpitud abituse teooriale (Maier & Seligman, 1976, 2016), käsitleb uurimus üleminekut traditsioonilisest hierarhiast isejuhtivale organisatsioonile kui õpitud abituse ümberõppimise protsessi. Uurimuse tulemusena kirjeldatakse kolme inimkesket tingimust – rollide ja vastutuse selgust, eesmärgist lähtuvat proaktiivset tegutsemist ning keerukat sotsiaalset vastastikmõju –, mis aitavad inimestel otsustusõigust sisemiselt omaks võtta ja seda praktiliselt rakendada.

Koos moodustavad need kolm uurimust integreeritud mitmetasandilise seletusraamistiku, milles jaotatud otsustusõiguse rakendumist käsitletakse organisatsioonilise disaini, inimmotivatsiooni ja otsustusõiguse omaksvõtmise vastastikuse protsessina (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000; Van de Ven & Poole, 1995). Väitekirj näitab, et isejuhtivus ei kujune üksnes formaalse otsustusõiguse struktuurse ümberjaotamise tulemusena, vaid eeldab samaaegselt sobivaid organisatsioonilisi tugi-mehhanisme, sh autonoomiat toetavat kultuuri ning inimeste toetamist rollipõhise vastutuse ja otsustusõiguse omaksvõtmisel.

Järeldused ja praktilised soovitused

Käesoleva väitekirja keskseks järelduseks on, et jaotatud otsustusõiguse edukas rakendamine ei sõltu üksnes organisatsioonilise struktuuri ümberkujundamisest, vaid kujuneb holakraatilise organisatsioonilise disaini, motivatsioonilise keskkonna ja rollitäitjate otsustusõiguse sisemise omaksvõtmise koosmõjus. Väitekirj näitab, et formaalselt jaotatud otsustusõigus ei muutu automaatselt tegelikuks isejuhtivuseks, kui organisatsiooni liikmed ei ole seda psühholoogiliselt omaks võtnud ega õppinud oma igapäevases tegevuses rakendama.

Praktilisest vaatenurgast viitavad uurimistulemused sellele, et isejuhtivate organisatsioonide kujundamisel ei piisa üksnes juhtimishierarhia vähendamisest või otsustusõiguse formaalsest ümberjaotamisest. Sama oluline on kujundada selged rollid ja vastutuspäärid, luua autonoomiat toetav organisatsioonikultuur ning toetada inimeste järkjärgulist kohanemist suurema vastutuse ja iseseisva otsustamisega. Väitekirj osutab, et holakraatilise organisatsioonilise disaini, psühholoogiliste baasvajaduste rahuldamise ja otsustusõiguse omaksvõtmise

koostoime loob eeldused isejuhtivate organisatsioonide kujunemiseks, mis toetavad inimeste optimaalset toimimist ja organisatsioonilist antifragiilsust.

Piirangud ja edasiarendusvõimalused

Käesoleva väitekirja tulemusi tuleb tõlgendada mitme piirangu valguses. Esiteks põhineb empiiriline uurimus ühe organisatsiooni pikaajalisel etnograafilisel juhtumiuuringul, mistõttu ei ole eesmärgiks tulemuste statistiline üldistamine, vaid jaotatud otsustusõiguse rakendumise mehhanismide süvateoreetiline avamine. Teiseks käsitletakse väitekirjas holakraatiat ühe konstitutsioonipõhise jaotatud otsustusõigust võimaldava juhtimisraamistikuna, kuid see ei hõlma kõiki võimalikke isejuhtivate organisatsioonide erivorme. Kolmandaks mõjutas autori kahetine roll nii holakraatia praktikuna kui ka uurijana paratamatult uurimisprotsessi, kuigi sellele on väitekirjas refleksiivselt tähelepanu pööratud.

Edasised uurimused võiksid käesolevas väitekirjas välja pakutud mitmetasandilist seletusraamistikku erinevates organisatsioonides ja kultuurikontekstides täiendavalt empiiriliselt uurida ja edasi arendada, kasutades selleks muu hulgas ka kvantitatiivseid ja segauurimismeetodeid. Erilist tähelepanu väärib otsustusõiguse omaksvõtmise protsess, mis aitab mõista, kuidas inimesed õpivad neile formaalselt antud rollipõhist otsustusõigust tegelikult kasutama ning miks osa jaotatud otsustusõigusele ülemineku katsetest osutuvad edukaks, samas kui paljudel juhtudel pöördutakse tagasi traditsiooniliste hierarhiliste juhtimismudelite juurde.

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