# HOW TO SELF-MANAGE COMPANY GROWTH

Changing the execution of the recruitment process — this was the mission Timetohire co-founder Edwin de Jonge set out on when he established the organization in 2018. This mission spread quickly across the organization, which specializes in organizing recruitment projects for other companies. The enthusiasm felt by colleagues Henke van Homoet and Kimberley de Jager contributed to the progression of the organization. They focused on creating a long-term recruitment strategy, one that would map out a personal journey rather than just linking recruits to the most popular destination.

### Blending the Philosophy

Timetohire has upheld a 'self-organizing' mentality from day one of its journey. Since then, this quality has been instilled in the 65 employees currently working at the organization. Of course, their journey wasn't all smooth-sailing — it came with some challenges. And, many of these challenges reflected certain myths surrounding self-management.

For one, the common myth that freedom leads to anarchy. This belief is the result of a hierarchical system that still rules many organizations, wherein autonomy is avoided for fear of lack of responsibility among employees. Timetohire didn't want this belief to bleed into their organization. They decided that by blending tenets and best practices from several ways of working, they could arrive at the right formula for their organization.

They found a perfect blend in Holacracy (and how it handled team structure), the Agile philosophy, and Semco Style. Mixing and matching these ways of working helped them formulate a new style that was the right fit for them. They created a system that allowed distribution of control to the various teams, supported by effective tools for communication and transparency.

Edwin explains, "Self-management has cleared the way towards a new structure of rules that form the backbone of our organization."

Timetohire drew inspiration from the great thinker Jean-Jacques Rousseau and his social contract, encouraging them to shape their work with the same sense of 'responsible freedom'.

### Expect Chaos

The team at Timetohire expected and accepted that there would be some chaos when implementing self-management principles. Creating a space where everyone is involved in matters that affect them comes with a certain amount of disagreement and turmoil. So how do you get past it?

The trick is to create a support system for employees that helps them feel safe to fail once in a while. As Edwin's says, "Embrace failure, within an affordable loss margin. The result is either a win or a learning opportunity."

However, embracing failure does not come naturally. Henke says, "You need to learn how to let go of your stubbornness." This, in turn, leads to a sense of acceptance when a new initiative does not deliver promised results. It also draws a realistic picture about how much time, energy and money is to be invested in the initiative.

Edwin adds, "As a leader, you have a prominent role in facilitating such a support system where teams feel safe enough to speak up and experiment. To prevent teams from looking to the leader when in need of answers, communicate objectives clearly, and then

gradually step back. If people don't understand the objective or the formation of boundaries, repeat as many times as needed. If people voice their doubts, one should see it as a sign of involvement — a sign that people care about the processes and results."

### The Timetohire Way of Working

Timetohire's way of working can be translated into three basic principles — trust, autonomy, and ownership. Trust is the foundation of any well-oiled organization, and this is seen in all their processes. It manifests itself in communication, the daily office atmosphere, and the culture of the organization. It allows teams and individuals to feel safe about pursuing their interests, communicate these, and, in doing so, create a sense of autonomy. Emphasizing trust in every process translates into people taking ownership of their work, and having the freedom and flexibility to set up their work based on their own views.

### Shark Tanks

A great way to encourage people to take ownership: 'shark tanks'. The concept is easy – every six months, employees have the opportunity to pitch their business ideas or ideas for creating additional services. The people at Timetohire jointly evaluate whether the idea has a future and whether they are willing to invest in it. This supports creative innovation and ideation in employees, with ownership as the core tenet.

### The Timetohire Handbook

A small handbook was created to be a guide to understanding the organization's way of working. This was to help new recruits get immersed in the core beliefs at Timetohire. How to interact, where to find information, what to expect of certain roles, and so forth – it's all in there. This kind of structure helped the organization find a way to strengthen the interdependency within teams, and thus, boost the importance of collaboration. The key factor in collaboration was the coming together of different kinds of backgrounds and experiences. This, Henke says,

## "SHOULD BE EMBRACED FIRST, AND THEN WE UNDERSTAND HOW TO CREATE VALUE OUT OF IT."

It is essential for transparency to flow through the organization. And for this to happen, teams must be aligned on a set of homegrown rules and structures. Arriving at a personalized way of working involves understanding the tenets of different ways of

working and being able to break down what works for you and what doesn't. So, rather than reinventing the wheel, you just have to sharpen the edges to your liking.

There are both internal and external benefits to this. For the client, dealing with teams that can make decisions independent of the larger majority of the organization, allows for more time to build a trusting relationship, as well as tailormade output.

As Edwin puts it, "We are able to progress quickly with our clients, thanks to the autonomy our people have in their everyday work lives and projects. This system is able to fulfill the most basic of requirements of any organization — happy people create happy customers, and therefore, bring about happy results."

An important aspect to take into account in this decentralized way of working is that information is now more scattered than before. There is not a single central operator any longer who controls the whole — the whole functions on its own.

### The Power of the Collective

Timetohire quickly recognized that for the guardian circles to function successfully, communication was key. The starting point was transparent and accessible information. However, in practice, working with this information also created certain expectations among peers. Oftentimes, these expectations differed from person to person. At this point, it became essential for expectations to be communicated clearly, and repeated from time to time. This created alignment between all stakeholders. Ultimately, the clear communication of expectations shaped a support system

### The Guardian Circle

Timetohire's 'guardian system' was an essential part of supporting individual growth and development. It was characterized by several domains, with one point of contact for support, which helped provide a base to fall back on for many employees. With such a set-up, however, an invisible hierarchy was created where peers looked to their guardians to solve challenges for them.

Though this system worked well when Timetohire was smaller, it needed to be revised for its current size. 'Reinventing Timetohire', as they call it, is a regular process, which one of their colleagues captured perfectly by saying, "When you walk a lot, your shoes will wear out. Therefore, it is sometimes good to change shoes."

This basically means that changing perspectives is vital. It does not mean the previous perspective was wrong, it just had its time.

In the new format, the 'guardian circle' seemed to work. They shifted towards a decentralized support system rather than a centralized one. They created domains that were guarded by several people at once – meaning multiple people took ownership of one domain. Kimberley says, "This way of working encouraged taking ownership, from which various forms of leadership emerged. In simple terms, it means that if you see an opportunity, go ahead and grab it. Leading by example and having others follow your course is the core understanding of our new guardian circle system."

that had its foundation on the strengths of the collective, paired with some simple guidelines.

This collective ownership mentality within the organization also benefited the growth of the company. The trajectory of the organization now lay in the hands of everyone. Each and every employee could align their personal interests to others in the organization, and in doing so, the business grew. The only requirement was to trust one's own abilities, with the courage to walk the talk.

Talking about the importance of a self-management style, Edwin says,

## "OUR BIGGEST LEARNING IS TO ALWAYS STAY TRUE TO OUR CULTURE."

With this kind of mindset, our values are set in stone and the raison d'être of our work is embedded in our daily routines."

Watch the full episode of this Semco Style Stories with Timetohire here!

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