

# The top 5 questions you must ask yourself before implementing self-management

Written by [SSI Global](#)

This first article briefly explains all five questions; the following articles aim to provide you with a more detailed analysis of the questions as well as helpful guidance on how to address them.

## 1. What is the maturity of the team?

Self-organizing teams can no longer turn to a manager to have the difficult conversations and to take the tough decisions. The team itself is responsible for those, which requires a solid foundation in team development. This foundation is the same for every team. So the first thing to do is to check whether every team member is on the same page about: the common goal, everyone's role, the meeting rhythm and other work agreements, decision making and giving and receiving feedback.

## 2. Are you choosing self-management or self-organization?

People often use the terms self-organization and self-management interchangeably. However, they are altogether different beasts. We see self-organization as an important intermediate step towards self-management, and it helps to make the distinction. With self-organization, the hierarchical pyramid is turned upside down. The management is given a facilitating role and places more responsibility on the teams, but still has an important role in setting goals, assessing and rewarding. Self-management goes one step further: employees are fully responsible for setting their own goals, strategy and sometimes also their own salary and bonus.

## 3. Are the frameworks clear?

The best functioning teams are teams in which people feel psychologically safe. Sudden and seemingly complete freedom undermines that psychological security, because it is no longer clear what the goals and rules are. We recommend setting up frameworks for results (as few KPIs as possible), quality, behavior and a number of crucial rules. Over time, teams will increasingly question and change the frameworks.

## 4. Do managers understand their new roles?

The biggest change when moving towards self-organization will be experienced by the management. Where traditional managers had a 'command-and-control' role, a facilitating and coaching approach is now expected of them. That requires re-contracting: establishing what their new role will be and what's expected of them. It also means saying goodbye to people who don't want to or are unable to participate in this way of working. Finally, it calls for a lot of restraint when things go wrong or when the results are disappointing. Too often, we see in those cases that managers

will quickly intervene in the way they were used to, sending the organization back to where it came from.

### **5. Is there a balance between planning and experimentation?**

About half of our clients call the transition to self-organization a voyage, an adventure, an experiment: a journey during which things are gradually discovered. That is a good approach, but it should not mean that the move towards self-organization is limited to superficial, non-committal experiments. If experiments fail, ask whether the structure of and management methods in the organization have been adequately adjusted; whether the necessary choices have been made, painful as though they might be. Conversely, if the organization gets stuck in making plans without ever executing them, then look for opportunities to experiment.