

Samantha Slade

GOING HORIZONTAL

CREATING A
NON-HIERARCHICAL
ORGANIZATION,
ONE PRACTICE
AT A TIME

Praise for *Going Horizontal*

“Going well beyond horizontal theory and concepts, this work is social practice in action; a wonderful companion for anyone who senses that reconnecting with our true human nature in our work is the only way forward.”

—**Mary O’Keeffe, Director, Loomio (New Zealand)**

“Samantha Slade offers a much-needed alternative to our current systems of organizing. Her book is as refreshing as it is personal and will be indispensable for those looking to bring more humanity into their organizations.”

—**Joel Bothello, Assistant Professor, Department of Management, John Molson School of Business, Concordia University (Canada)**

“This book is for anyone who’s ever wondered what the future of truly fulfilling work could look like.”

—**Melissa Aronczyk, Associate Professor of Journalism and Media Studies, Rutgers University (USA)**

“Samantha Slade—and this book—is what the world of work needs more of. Sparky thinking, applied methodologies, and humanist principles.”

—**Perry Timms, *HR Most Influential Thinker 2017*, founder of PTHR, and author of *Transformational HR* (UK)**

“Samantha is on the leading edge of self-management for organizations. She is breaking ground to discover and share the new ways we can work together that we are all starving for.”

—**Amanda Hachey, Director, NouLAB (Canada)**

“In the transformation of our society to become more human, Samantha is a reference.”

—**Étienne Collignon, President, TeamFactory, and learning systems teacher (France)**

“If there’s anyone who knows how to structure workplaces in new, more effective, more energizing ways, it’s Samantha Slade. Her book, *Going Horizontal*, is a masterwork in how to turn a sluggish hierarchical organization into one that’s egalitarian and alive.”

—**Mark Levy, founder of Levy Innovation LLC and author of *Accidental Genius* (USA)**

“Samantha Slade has, with her own life, taken a bold journey into the landscape of how we can evolve our organizations, lead together, and focus on the purposes we choose to serve. I invite you to listen to her, understand her message, be inspired, and enjoy your own practice for a more humane and kinder world.”

—**Toke Paludan Moeller, sustainable entrepreneurship pioneer, Art of Hosting steward, and cofounder and CEO, Interchange (Denmark)**

“Samantha outlines in clear, concrete, and highly accessible language tested practices, ranging from the personal to the systemic, that support participatory ways of working to flatten and democratize organizations. I can easily envision this book quickly becoming a standard reference for those involved in organizational development and change design at every level.”

—**Rosemary C. Reilly, Graduate Program Director, MA in Human Systems Intervention, and Associate Professor, Concordia University (Canada)**

“A brilliant distillation of lived experience, field research, and more academic research—transformed into simple practices to live by. It turns all the philosophical discussions about collaboration and self-organization into incredibly practical and doable practices.”

—**Caroline Rennie, cofounder of Gen-H (Switzerland)**

“This is a brilliant field guide from a practitioner and organization designer who has dared to explore, experiment with, and engage with the new ways of working and being. This book must be in the list of essential reading for the #futureofwork.”

—**Sahana Chattopadhyay, Asia-Pacific thought leader on the future of work and Partner, Enlivening Edge (India)**

“*Going Horizontal* is a gift to anyone eager to see beyond the trappings of traditional hierarchy and explore new ways of working and being.”

—**Brent Lowe, The Scale Coach for Founder CEOs (Canada) and coauthor of *Reinventing Scale-Ups***

“Samantha Slade shares her knowledge and experience with accuracy, wisdom, and amazing gentleness. This book and the proposed practices are a truly precious help and compass toward more horizontality in my organization.”

—**Damien Versele, CEO, De Sleutel (Belgium)**

“Sam Slade’s *Going Horizontal* finally brings the notion of cocreation out of the theoretical realm and makes it practical and achievable.”

—**Roxane Maranger, Aquatic Ecosystem Ecologist and Professor of Biology, University of Montréal, and President-Elect, Association for the Sciences of Limnology and Oceanography (Canada)**

“*Going Horizontal* is a key piece in the field of organizational consciousness and working transformatively in the 21st century.”

—**Melinda Várfi, AoH practitioner and cofounder of Organik (Hungary) and Resonanz (Austria)**

“*Going Horizontal* speaks to the three innate and universal psychological needs for humans to function optimally: self-direction, competence, and relatedness. If you want to increase the probability of having a workplace where fun, purpose, and meaning create a greater good, read this book.”

—**Jacques Forest, organizational psychologist; Professor, School of Management, Université du Québec à Montréal; and Chartered Professional in Human Resources (Canada)**

“The time has come for every enterprise to reimagine and redesign how it works, and *Going Horizontal* will be a key resource.”

—**MJ Kaplan, Partner, The Ready, and Board Member, Loomio (USA)**

“I especially appreciate the ‘how to’ approach as this is where you will struggle most when implanting changes that are based on sharing and participation.”

—**Bernd Reichert, Executive Director, Executive Agency for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (Belgium)**

“Samantha embodies a new way of seeing work and living it, and that is how she has helped transform our organization, step by step.”

—**Huguette Robert, Director, and Steeven Pedneault, Social Designer, Présâges (Canada)**

“More than ever, the public sector needs talent like Samantha to learn a basic human skill for our democracy: cooperation for social innovation.”

—**Cécile Joly, Project Director, Collaborative Public Innovation and Learning Lab, National Center of Territorial Public Administration (France)**

“Read this book to learn how to see the world in a new perspective and develop a new set of muscles for building the commons!”

—**David Bollier, author of *Think like a Commoner* (USA)**

“Discover how to step into a more mature and responsible management paradigm where human beings can get up to a different level of mastery and purpose alignment. This book has challenged my own beliefs and ideas about my responsibility to be the change.”

—**Ana Manzanedo, Governance Connector, Ouishare (Spain)**

“Samantha embodies the principles she upholds: a profound respect of the contribution of each individual and mastery of the science of efficient collaborative processes.”

—**Manon Poirier, Executive Director, Quebec Chartered Professionals in Human Resources (Canada)**

“Samantha Slade deeply understands the power and vitality of non-hierarchical cultures. I highly recommend *Going Horizontal* as a tool when developing your horizontal culture.”

—**Sarah Houseman, PhD, Governance Researcher, La Trobe University (Australia)**

“With Samantha Slade’s book, we now have an insightful resource to help people understand how to operate effectively in this new paradigm. This is the ultimate companion for going horizontal.”

—**Edwin Jansen, Head of Marketing, Fitzii (Canada)**

“This book is a must-read, discussing seven domains that are critical in a horizontal context.”

—**Ivo Bols, CEO, Irisoft Solutions (Belgium)**

“Samantha’s creativity and way of being enliven the collective intelligence methods that she embodies.”

—**Denis Cristol, Coach and Director of Training Platforms, National Center of Territorial Public Sector (France)**

“Samantha succeeds in opening up collaboration perspectives that are little known. She reminds us that we are never too small to act.”

—**Renée Ouimet, Director, Quebec Mental Health Movement (Canada)**



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Going Horizontal

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*To all the brave souls on your bumpy path
to grow more horizontal ways of working,
in yourselves and around yourselves.
Your personal leadership is building
a better future for us all.*



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PREFACE



When I was twenty-one years old, I was studying cultural anthropology at McGill University in Montreal, Canada. In my lectures and textbooks, I was learning about the different ways societies organize themselves and about revolutions. It was the 1980s, and a revolution was going on in Nicaragua.

Nicaragua had received the distinguished UNESCO (United Nations Scientific, Educational, and Cultural Organization) honor for its bold and hugely successful literacy campaign that had increased literacy by almost 40 percent in only five months. The program had become an international inspiration. I was intrigued that this was achieved by educators working with thousands of youth groups. In fact, the country was going through a transformation, and the decentralized approaches to many aspects of the redesign fascinated me.

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I became curious to speak directly to people about their experience and understand more. I decided to put my studies on hold for a year, and off I went, on my own, to Nicaragua.

Within minutes of entering the country, I was struck by the mood of the people. The bus was alive with good-natured banter and critique about the new shape the country was taking. There was one other foreigner on my bus from the border, a young man from Finland who was curious about the revolution like I was. People took our hands and, turning over our palms, laughed. If we did not have worker hands, how could we contribute to the revolution? Laughter and loud talk surrounded us. Everyone had an opinion on everything.

At the start of the revolution, it was said that 1 percent of the population owned 47 percent of the land. By way of agrarian reform, idle, underused, or abandoned properties were confiscated. The country debated about how to achieve fairer land ownership. Cooperative farms were growing. Some cooperatives that produced goods and services set up day care centers and social programs for their workers. I volunteered at the day care center and summer school of a cigar-producing cooperative. The impact of the famous Nicaraguan literacy campaign was tangible.¹ The campaign was designed for wider social transformation governed with multiple civil society actors at the national, departmental, and municipal levels. Thousands of secondary and university students and teachers volunteered for five months to teach literacy in rural areas while living and working with peasant families. The program was intentionally bridging socio-economic divides. A similar initiative was going on in the medical field to bring medicine to rural areas, and a cultural initiative was capturing rural folktales, music, and customs

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and funneling these stories back into the literacy initiative. The reform was managed in a responsive way rather than being preplanned, making use of a network of 47 shortwave radios.

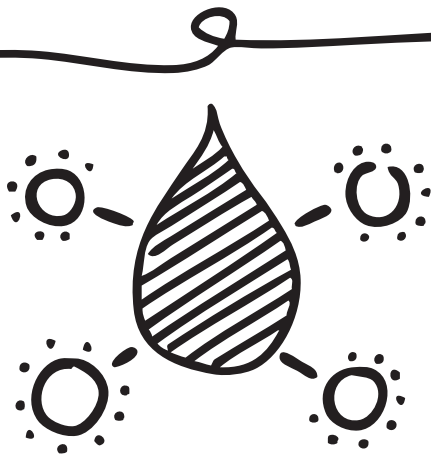
The new government was accelerating culture with nationwide poetry workshops and culture centers. During this time Nicaragua became the world capital of murals. Artists, both local and international, created outdoor democratic museums. There was a sense of possibility of a different type of country, but there was also a great deal of economic hardship. The economy was out of control, and prices were rising rapidly. The price of a restaurant meal could double by the time you finished eating. War was raging in the jungle. I was trained to protect myself from random armed attacks of the Contras.

Observing these changes in Nicaragua, I gained an awareness that we create the systems we live in, but we can also change them. The organizational and institutional forms we take for granted are but one model, and many more models are possible. I learned the power of decentralized actions and had my first experience of cooperative approaches. The literacy approach and the results it achieved still stand as one of the most astonishing today.

Later, I was drawn to education as a way to improve our society in Canada. I became a teacher, taught teachers, developed curriculum and learning materials, and ended up advising on policy in a Canadian ministry of education. It was a long and rich journey to the discovery that effecting change as a bureaucrat was not a match for me—the ideal place for me to effect change was in fact as an entrepreneur. I wanted to participate in the action.

Preface

At the age of 40, I left my government job and co-founded a business, Percolab, that would be a full-on experiment of what a company can be. Percolab is a co-design and co-creation firm that provides support to organizations and ecosystems to step into their futures. It is all about rolling up our sleeves to try out a more participatory and collaborative culture. Each Percolab office is employee managed, and the entire network is self-governed.

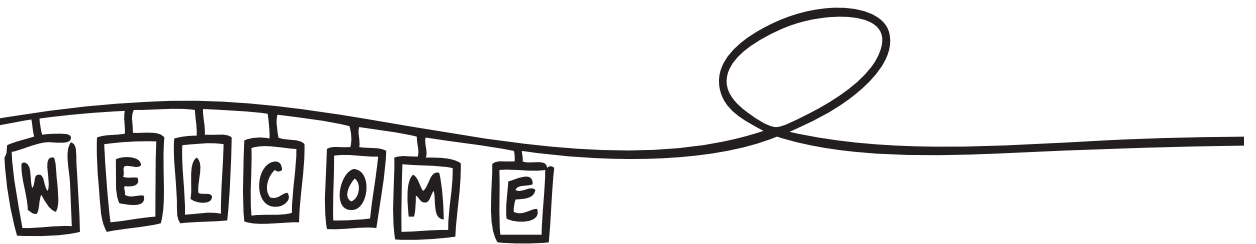


We now have more than 10 years of applied ethnographic observation through the fine-tuning of our experimental operational system and organizational culture and our varied client work in multiple countries. Along with my colleagues and the wider community, I have been making sense of the patterns and the practices that have emerged while living with them and experimenting with them. Beyond the theories and science, I live with and witness the difference that more participatory ways and flatter organizations can make. I have been geeking out, collecting practices and trying them out with teams, clients, and allies for so long that I am full of enthusiasm about all that is possible. Now it is time for me

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to share. I hear the need and the hunger, for I realize what a unique opportunity it is to have this playing field to try out these practices with others. This book takes all I have learned over the years and passes it back to the field. My background in education and anthropology have been put to more use than I could ever have imagined. Over time I find myself bumping into others, all over the planet, who feel similarly and are stepping away from the traditional ways of doing work and business to create something that makes more sense. People are hungry for resources to help them. It is still a pioneering field that goes by many names. Some call it “participatory leadership” or “collective leadership,” others call it “self-managing organizations” or “self-governing organizations,” and still others call it “employee-led organizations” or “co-managed organizations.” I have chosen to use the terms “horizontal” and “non-hierarchical” for this book. I use them interchangeably. They feel expansive enough to encompass this field. I trust that my experiences, errors, and years of sensemaking can be a constructive source for others.

INTRODUCTION



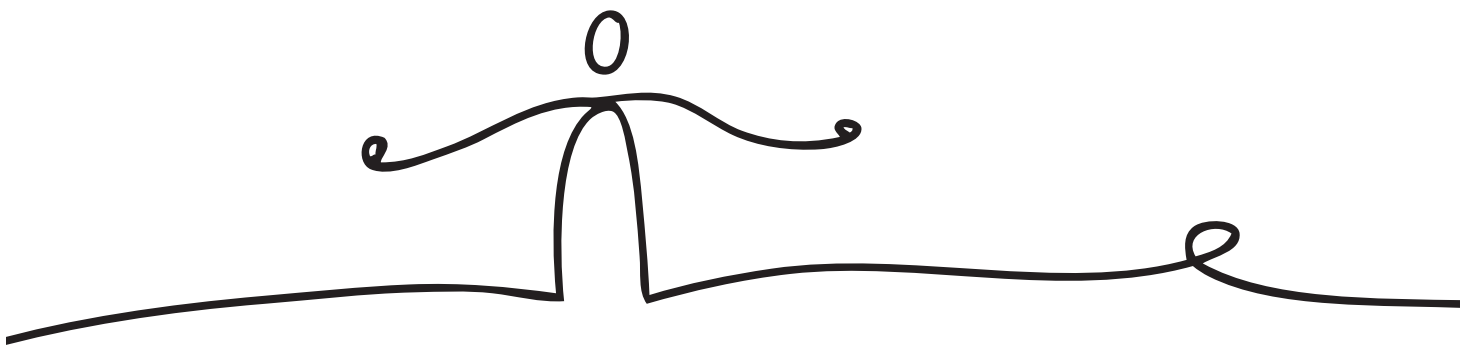
If you are interested in developing your understanding and capacity in horizontal practices, this book is for you. It doesn't matter if you work within an organization or if you are a member of a group or club or a freelancer or student. No matter what your experience with horizontal organizations, welcome!

This book should help you get further clarity and move forward from wherever you are. The practices in this book can help you step away from fear-based thinking that a plan and control culture strengthens. They help you get back to trusting one another, and they start with you. They help anyone at any level of an organization—from the CEO who wants to take an entire organization horizontal to the entry-level assistant who sees a bright future in this work. Whether you

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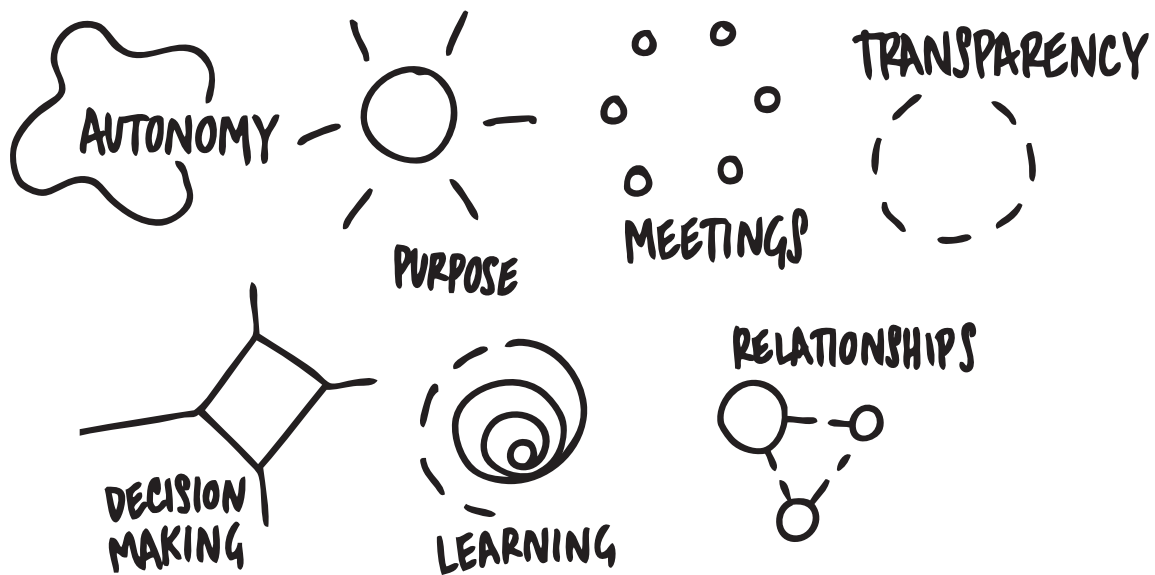
are the CEO or the assistant, you will want to start with your own actions, and only then look outward to the rest of your organization.

It doesn't matter if your organization is well into its non-hierarchical journey, just starting, or even dead set against horizontal ways; this book should be helpful for you because it meets you where you are. The most important requirement is that you are curious and want to learn more. We each arrive to this possibility with different questions. How do you get people to enjoy their work and take initiative? How can the organization be more democratic, participatory, co-creative? How do you keep brilliant team members from leaving? How can your organization embody your values better? At one point the questions become more personal. What do I want it to be in this team, this organization, this community? How am I moving this forward? This book is not about examining what is wrong with your organization or your colleagues; instead, it is about your own non-hierarchical mind-set and ways. How are *you* embodying non-hierarchical practices, and where can they deepen and expand?

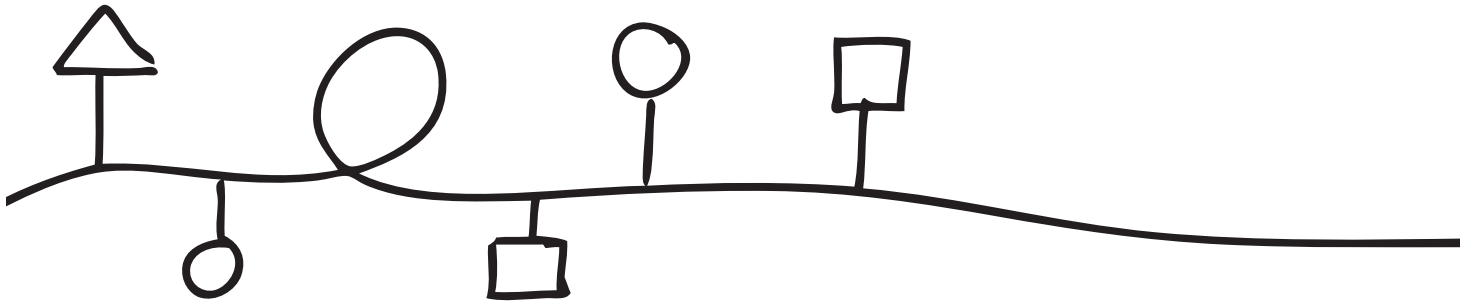


Everywhere I go, when I talk about how we have cornered ourselves into habits and ways of working, ways that don't make sense, people nod in agreement. Rarely does that statement get challenged. When I add, "and we are not quite sure

how to move things along,” the nod is even more emphatic. It’s an acknowledgment that something is amiss in our organizations and that we are confused about finding a path forward. This book offers supportive frameworks to help you get beyond the current hierarchical culture we have become accustomed to. The practices and structures in this book will help you cultivate and grow non-hierarchical culture in your organization. By starting with yourself, you can give space and opportunity to grow the non-hierarchical ways in others around you.

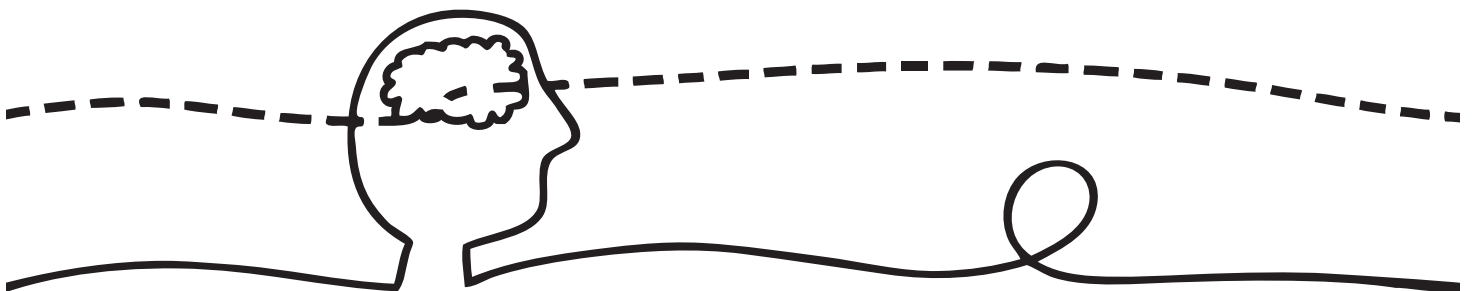


The book is organized into chapters on the seven domains of practice that are common to most all organizations: autonomy, purpose, meetings, transparency, decision making, learning and development, and relationships and conflict. In each of these chapters, I explain why the domain of practice is critical to horizontal organizations and mind-set, I offer ways to recognize how similar horizontal practices might be



showing up in your life outside of work, and I lay out some foundational practices of each domain that you can start using in your organization right away. Throughout the book you are invited to do regular exercises that will help you take the practices into your organizational context—mapping your organizational culture, reflecting on how you would want to be functioning, and exploring possibilities around you.

The book includes a sprinkling of models and theory to ground the work. The final chapter serves to guide you into strategic actions for your specific organizational context and requires that you have read all the preceding chapters. There is an order to the practice domains that are presented in the book, as together they constitute a comprehensive path into horizontal habits. At the same time, if a particular domain is pulling you in, know that each chapter stands on its own and you can jump back and forth. This book helps you develop new ways of seeing the daily details of your organization and how you do things, understand the differences between behaviors that support a hierarchical or non-hierarchical mind-set, and look at the complexity those behaviors interconnect with.



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You will find ways to try out new behaviors for yourself and with others. Maybe you will start outside of work or in informal groups before you bring them into work. Maybe you have perfect opportunities right in front of you that this book will help you see. The idea is to start small with consciousness and then to grow and widen, always keeping the focus on lived experience. One thing that you will need to be uncompromising about is the following: *you* are the prototype space. Stop proposing for others and start with yourself.

STARTS
WITH YOU



Chances are, you will be both validated and challenged in things that you are doing. We do not need to wait for some higher authority to give us permission to embark on a non-hierarchical journey. The journey starts with each of us. This is everyone's work. Many books target leaders, and that is important because leaders have the power to change the organizational structure. However, because a horizontal culture includes everyone, this book speaks to everyone in the organization.