



WORKBOOK 3

Plugging your Organization into Evolution

Welcome to the workbook for Module 3 of the Agents of Conscious Business course, with Brian Robertson!

The aim of this third class was to explore more conscious ways of organizing, drawing on Brian's insights from Holacracy, an organizational operating system he pioneered in his own (former) software company. Short of implementing Holacracy, what can each of us do to generate more organizational consciousness, clarity and flow?

The points that were covered:

- How to work with tensions to plug your organization into evolution
- Being a 'sensor' for the organization – and what gets in the way of that
- Meeting practices to generate organizational clarity
- What it feels like to live and work in an organization that is reliably sensing and processing tensions into organizational evolution

This workbook is going to make most sense if you have listened to the recording of the class for module 3.

You can either listen to the whole thing and then dive into this workbook, or do it in parallel, pausing the recording to work on an exercise, and then listening to the next bit.

The Five Big Ideas from the Class

Here are the five main things that we took from this module's class with Brian:



1 - A tension is a huge source of energy... if you can sense and process it

If there was one thing that came up again and again during the class with Brian, it's the concept of a tension. Brian defines a tension as "the felt-sense of a specific gap between current reality and a sensed potential." Or in other words, the *experience* of a gap between where the organization currently is, and where it could be.

We often judge those gaps as being a 'problem' that needs to be 'solved'. In fact, most organizations today are designed to prevent tensions. Brian's main point here is that a tension is neither good nor bad by itself – it's simply energy. But it's only energy if you can sense it (i.e. be aware of it) and if you have some way of processing it into a decision or action that moves the organization closer towards its purpose (i.e. where it could be).

2 - Like the instruments on a plane, we show up as 'sensors' for the organization

So how does an organization 'sense tensions'? Here, Brian used the analogy of flying a plane towards a certain destination (purpose), and using the plane's instruments to sense gaps between where you currently are and where you want to be. Each instrument is tuned into a different aspect of reality (fuel, voltage, altitude, speed, etc.)

We would never even think of 'outvoting' the fuel gauge because the other sensors aren't 'seeing it'... and yet this happens all the time in organizations! Wherever you are in the organization, you are a sensor that's tuned into specific and often unique aspects of reality. The only way a business can be a 'conscious business', is by harnessing the consciousness of the individuals that show up in service of it.

A conscious business is one that's able to reliably process the tensions that are being sensed by anyone, anywhere in the organization.

3 - One tension at a time, sensed by one person

Most people know Brian as the guy that pioneered Holacracy, which is an organizational operating system to do exactly that: rapidly and reliably processing tensions sensed by anyone anywhere in the organization into organizational evolution. If you're interested in Holacracy, we'll provide some resources at the end of this workbook.

In the meantime, if you're not working in an organization that's running Holacracy already, what can you do with this? One principle that Brian shared is "One tension at a time, sensed by one person." It looks simple enough, but if you introduce this principle in your meetings, they will be transformed.



4 - 'Heroic leadership' gets in the way of evolving the organization

So if it's all about sensing and processing tensions, why isn't that happening naturally and effortlessly? What gets in the way? Brian talked about a number of 'traps' that we get stuck in and that get in the way of us sensing and processing tensions. One common trap is to get distracted by theoretical tensions, rather than actual, *felt* tensions, for example by trying to predict the future and everything that we think *could* or *should* happen.

One of the other things that *most* get in the way, however, is... you! Brian referred to this as being the 'heroic leader' who tries to heroically sense and process all tensions for the entire team or organization. Or who thinks he can sense other people's tensions and process them *for* them (and maybe better and faster, too!)

The trouble with heroic leadership is that it fails to harness what everyone else is sensing, and it (you) inevitably becomes a bottleneck for the further evolution of the organization. The key is show up autonomously and sense and process your own tensions, while allowing everyone else to sense and process *their* tensions. Again, it comes back to: one tension at a time, sensed by one person!

5 - Meetings don't have to be 5-hour things that you absolutely dread

Wouldn't it be cool if this were true? Well, it is. In fact, meetings can be the place where organizational evolution is happening in real-time. In a fraction of the time you typically need to get extremely frustrated and arrive at another middle-of-the-road solution for a problem you're not sure is even real...

Brian gave a few tips for what you can do when you lead a meeting, or even when you're only a participant. Collect the tensions that everyone is sensing and use them to build an agenda on-the-fly (rather than in advance). Then process each agenda item (tension) by focusing on the person who sensed it, and helping them process it ("What do you need?") If that's not immediately clear, just focus on the physical next step that's needed to get things moving again. Again, Holacracy has a lot to say about how you run meetings, if you want to dig deeper into this!

Sensing and Processing Tensions

As we explored during the call and in Big Idea number 2, the only way an organization can 'sense' a tension, is by using its 'sensors'... which is you and all the other folks in the organization!



Exercise!

Pick an organization that you fill some type of role in. It may be as an employee, as a manager, as the CEO, or even as a coach or consultant. Now reflect on the following questions and write down some of your first thoughts.

How much of what you sense is being picked up, or listened to? How much of it is being acted upon in some way? Have you ever experienced being 'outvoted' as a sensor?

If you're a sensor for your organization, how well are you being 'used'? What is being used, and what's not?

Now let's move on to sensing some actual tensions. You can make it real by considering some of the roles that you fill in your organization, or even in multiple organizations. There may be just one, really clear role, or for some of you there may be a lot of roles, some clear and some not so clear.



As an example, Diederick fills two roles in Waking Up the Workplace:

- 1) Content Director (accountable for creating quality content)
- 2) Speaker Liaison (accountable for liaising with speakers and teachers)

The roles I fill in the different organizations I work in/with:

Now for each role, clarify its overall purpose. This is not so much *what* it does, but more *why* it does that. Again, an example from Waking Up the Workplace:

- 1) Content Director: To support individuals in the evolution of their understanding and practice of Conscious Business
- 2) Speaker Liaison: To make the wisdom and experience of the world's foremost Conscious Business speakers and teachers available and accessible through the offerings of Waking Up the Workplace

The purpose of the roles I fill in the different organizations I work in/with:



Now pick one role that's currently very alive for you. Let's start sensing some tensions, or put differently, let's start sensing some *felt* gaps between where you currently are in this role and where you feel you could be. Don't worry about ordering them in any way for now, and don't think about this very much. A tension is a *felt* sense of a gap. It's not all the gaps you could theoretically come up with!

To start, finish the following sentence for the role you picked, keeping in mind the purpose you just identified for it.

What gets in the way of the natural expression of the purpose of my role, is ...

If you want, you can do the same thing for any of your other roles!

Now that we have some real tensions, let's see if we can process them into some kind of clarity for the role and for the organization.

Out of your list of tensions, pick one for the next exercise. If you want, you can pick the one you feel is most urgent or important, but it doesn't matter very much. Now with that tension in mind, answer the following questions.

What do you need? Some examples here: I need a decision on something, I need your input on something, I want to get clarity on what we need to do, I want clarity on who has the authority to decide this, etc.



If there were one physical next action you could take to move this forward, what would it be?

Some more examples: Call Brian to prepare the class, email participants to announce the next class, write a draft for the workbook, research potential speakers for the interview series, etc.

Notice that they all start with a verb, and it's always a verb that refers to a physical activity, such as calling, buying, emailing, writing, printing, talking to (as opposed to more abstract verbs such as organizing, finalizing, ensuring, implementing, resolving, etc.)

This take discipline and practice, and if you find it hard you should know we'll go deeper into this in Module 7 with David Allen!

If it takes more than just one physical next action to address this tension, what would be the desired outcome?

Examples here would include: Workbook finished, Successful meeting with X, Holacracy implemented, Marketing campaign launched, etc.

There are two ways to learn more about processing tensions. One is diving deeper into Holacracy, which we'll provide some resources for below (see Bonus). Holacracy is all about how the *organization* can process tensions through specific practices for making decisions and running meetings. The second is to join David Allen's upcoming class, which will focus (among other things) on how to process tensions as an *individual*. So, more to come!



Bonus: Resources on Holacracy

Here's a few recommendations for diving deeper into how Holacracy deals with sensing and processing tensions:

- 1) Watch the 60-minute video of one of Brian's introductory webinars
- 2) Read the whitepaper "Organization Evolved"
- 3) Read some of Brian's blog posts – they're short and powerful!
- 4) Attend an Introductory webinar (online) or an Introduction workshop (offline) – check out the schedule on HolacracyOne's website to find out more!

You'll find these on the [website of HolacracyOne](#) and on the [course page for this module](#).

Finally, we wanted to share with you a recording of a dialogue between Jeroen, Ewan and Brian that happened in 2009. If you filled out our survey last year, you may have already seen this, but we expect it's new for most of you! In this dialogue, we dive deeper into organization as a vehicle for evolution, and touch on Holacracy more explicitly. You'll find it on the [course page for this module](#) as well. Enjoy!

That's it for this module's class "Plugging your Organization into Evolution"! We hope to see you all in Module 4 with Bill Torbert. As always, you'll find more info on that on the [Academy website](#).

If you have any comments or questions, please email us at mail@wakinguptheworkplace.com or throw a comment on the Academy website page for [Module 3](#).