

# Case Study: Mein Grundeinkommen

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Ines Bauer

*Purpose:* “We want a fair and crisis-proof world in which everyone can live a self-determined life” by raffling unconditional basic income and promoting education, science, and research on the unconditional basic income and its financing.

*Design Trait:* Governance

*Innovative Practice:* Holacracy-Based Governance Design

## Key Facts

*Mein Grundeinkommen* is a Berlin based not-for-profit organisation that crowdfunds and raffles off unconditional basic incomes (UBI). They started giving away UBIs in 2014. As of today, more than 1,900 UBIs have been paid out. More than 3.8 million people have signed up to be able to participate in their raffles. More than 200,000 people support the organisation with their donations every month.

**Established:** 2014 in Berlin

**Founder:** Michael Bohmeyer

**Ownership:** Not-for-profit registered association

**Legal form:** Not-for-profit registered association

**Employees:** 38 (2025)

**Webpage:** <https://www.mein-grundeinkommen.de/infos/in-english>

## Purpose, Business Model & Objectives

Purpose: “We want a fair and crisis-proof world in which everyone can live a self-determined life” by raffling unconditional basic income and promoting education, science, and research on the unconditional basic income and its financing.

*Mein Grundeinkommen* is an organisation based in Berlin dedicated to promoting the concept of unconditional basic income while simultaneously advancing research on its effects. Through crowdfunding, the organisation collects funds and distributes them as an unconditional basic income to individuals selected through a raffle. The organisation's primary goal is to study the impact of basic income on people's lives and to raise awareness of this concept within society. Operating as a registered not-for-profit association, *Mein Grundeinkommen's* purpose is legally binding, ensuring that all activities align with its mission to maintain not-for-profit status. The organisation is entirely funded by donations and relies on a network of researchers, institutes, universities, and individuals who share an interest in the concept of unconditional basic income.

Figure 1: The Raffle in which the Lucky Winners of The Unconditional Basic Income are Selected

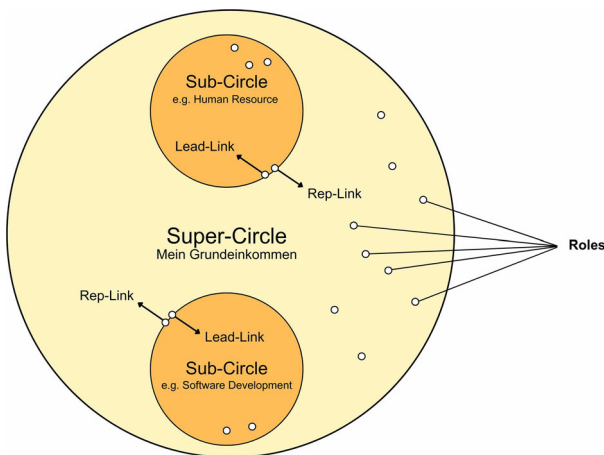


Source: Melber 2021.

## Insights into the Holacracy-Based Governance Design

For several years, *Mein Grundeinkommen* has been internally organised using the principles of holacracy. Developed by Brian Robertson in 2016, holacracy replaces traditional hierarchical structures with a system that distributes decision-making authority across various circles and roles. Each circle is a self-organised team responsible for specific tasks, operating within the broader framework of the organisation (here: *Mein Grundeinkommen*), which is referred to as the Super-Circle. The teams, known as Sub-Circles (e.g. Human Resource or software development), are granted autonomy in their decision-making, yet their actions influence other parts of the organisation, necessitating coordination and communication. To facilitate communication between these circles, holacracy employs two key roles: the Lead Link and the Representative Link. The Lead Link ensures that the Super-Circle's needs and priorities are reflected in the Sub-Circle's activities, while the Representative Link ensures that the Sub-Circle's work is visible and well-integrated within the broader organisation. This double linking helps maintain alignment across the organisation while preserving the autonomy of individual teams. Figure 1 shows holacratic structures with an example of the circles, as they exist at *Mein Grundeinkommen*. Maximilian Hoffmann, software developer at *Mein Grundeinkommen*, notes that the circles are not static but rather change dynamically over time.

Figure 2: Exemplary Representation of the Holacratic Structures at *Mein Grundeinkommen*



Source: Modified design based on Robertson 2016: 47.

The internal organisational structure is further influenced by *Mein Grundeinkommen's* status as an association, with a board regularly elected by the organisation's members. The elected board chair, a single individual, has the authority to appoint additional board members. This selection process is at the discretion of the chair. The board must follow instructions from the general assembly of members, allowing for democratic leadership.

To overcome the board's bureaucratic workload and distribute responsibility more evenly, *Mein Grundeinkommen* has introduced the concept of Special Representatives. These individuals are granted legal authority to make decisions in specific areas, acting independently within their domain. This approach helps distribute the workload and efficient decision-making without overburdening the board, aligning well with the decentralised holacracy model.

One of the most distinctive features of *Mein Grundeinkommen's* governance structure is its role distribution, which results in what is described as dynamic job design. This holacracy-shaped approach allows new roles to be created, assumed, and experimented with at any time, actively supported by the organisation's members. Within a circle, tasks are clearly defined, and the distribution of roles helps achieve the respective goals. Maximilian Hoffmann reports

“that responsibilities are not tied to a single person, such as a manager, but rather that we divide these responsibilities into several roles. These responsibilities can then be filled by different people, and one can also relinquish roles or take on new ones without having to resign or change companies.”

Roles within the organisation emerge from existing tensions, needs, or through new hires and can also be relinquished if no longer needed or when a project is completed, illustrating the dynamic nature of role assignment.

In holacracy, additional roles such as Facilitator and Secretary, elected by the team, are needed. Facilitators organise and moderate meetings, while Secretaries provide technical support during meetings and ensure that holacratic rules are followed and decisions are made according to plan. The roles and their responsibilities are typically outlined in the so-called Holacracy Constitution. Maximilian Hoffmann emphasises,

“I started out primarily as a software developer [...] Over time, as often happens in Holacracy, I've taken on and tried out additional roles. For example, last year, I served as the Secretary of the Super Circle [...]. Since we also have the structure of an association, I was involved in the association meetings and particularly focused on taking minutes. Right now, our board stepped down at the end of the year, as many of them decided to move on to new companies or went on maternity leave. Therefore, a new board was elected at the end of last year, which opened up several

new roles. I will likely be taking on the organisational development role at *Mein Grundeinkommen*.”

He highlights:

“I’m constantly in such a dual role or even multiple roles, as is the case with all of us. On the one hand, I’m still continuing with software development and remain active in various circles, but on the other hand, I also have this second part of organisational development coming up soon, as well as other roles, such as the Secretary role.”

Another innovative aspect of *Mein Grundeinkommen*’s governance structure is its needs-based salary model. This model assigns a transparent salary to each employee, considering their individual needs and life circumstances such as having children, repaying study loans, or pursuing particular hobbies. To realise this need-based salary approach, *Mein Grundeinkommen* uses four principles: the needs parameter, where team members indicate how much salary they require or wish to receive; the organisation parameter, which assesses the salary’s fairness and feasibility within the organisation’s financial and salary structures; the performance parameter, which determines an appropriate amount based on experience and working hours; and the ideals parameter, which considers non-monetary compensation, such as flexible working hours. Salary negotiations are conducted in team meetings to ensure transparency. Team members can always raise objections to adjustments. The salary system is being currently revised to better align with the association’s legal form, as it may not comply with the not-for-profit status of the association based on the German law. The challenge is that salaries are financed through donations, making it difficult to justify allowing employees to set their own salaries. This raises concerns about transparency and compliance with not-for-profit regulations. Also, the company wants to more clearly define the objections and rules, making the basis for decisions more comprehensible for everyone.

Further innovative elements of the holacracy-based governance design are autonomous decision-making, purpose-driven goal-setting and decentralised leadership. Decision-making within *Mein Grundeinkommen* is characterised by role autonomy, a core principle of holacracy. This empowers individuals to make decisions related to their specific roles without seeking approval from others, contrasting sharply with traditional hierarchical models where decisions are typically made by a small group of leaders. By distributing decision-making power throughout the organisation, *Mein Grundeinkommen* fosters a culture of empowerment and responsibility. To support these decision-making processes, the organisation provides budgets that can be used autonomously by individuals and teams, giving

members the confidence to make decisions within their scope without needing to consult others.

Furthermore, there are two main types of meetings: Tactical Meetings and Governance Meetings. Tactical Meetings focus on operational decisions, while Governance Meetings address structural issues such as role definitions and responsibilities. In line with the principles of holacracy, *Mein Grundeinkommen* employs integrative decision-making, ensuring decisions align with assigned roles and objective requirements. Decisions are based on consent, not consensus. While consensus requires the agreement of all involved parties for a proposed course of action, consent means that not everyone needs to agree. Instead, a decision can be blocked if a role holder presents a fact-based objection. This allows decisions to move forward even if not all participants agree and makes the decision process faster and more efficient.

Goal setting at *Mein Grundeinkommen* is largely driven by the organisation's purpose, with its social mission legally tied to the association. In most cases, especially for larger and long-term goals, decisions are made collectively within the team. To assist in this process, goals are defined within the framework of impact matrices and regularly monitored, based on the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's OECD sustainability goals. The goal-setting process is divided into five key parts: inputs (determining resources needed), activities (outlining project implementation), outputs (tangible results generated), outcomes (assessing impact of outputs), and goal review (ensuring alignment with overarching objectives). This structured approach ensures projects not only produce concrete results but also achieve their intended impact in line with broader objectives.

Leadership at *Mein Grundeinkommen* is decentralised and not governed by hierarchy, operating in a role-based system. So, "there are different roles, and the individuals within their roles can make decisions independently". However, despite holacracy, leadership by individuals is necessary in certain situations not to make decisions for others, but to take on responsibility and manage specific tasks. Maximilian Hoffmann explains that leadership

"always requires energy, and it's always a matter of weighing things up. There are people who may have more energy, and others who have less energy, or are more inclined to take the lead, while others are less inclined to do so."

This results in a dynamic leadership style shaped by situational factors, supported by leadership workshops offered by *Mein Grundeinkommen*.

## How the Holacracy-Based Governance Design Enables Regenerative and Distributive Dynamics

The dynamic roles and distribution of responsibilities within holacracy enable several regenerative and distributive dynamics compared to traditional companies. Responsibilities are distributed across multiple roles held by different individuals, allowing employees to easily take on new responsibilities or tasks or relinquish roles with relative ease. This flexibility benefits employees, as the duration of a role can be shortened if resources are no longer available, and responsibilities are fulfilled more effectively with increased time, resources, and capacity. These practices unlock a fairer distribution of the tasks to be done based on time needs and individual resources of every member. The potential for individuals to assume roles such as Facilitator or Secretary, is also noteworthy, enhancing their understanding of holacracy's functionality.

An additional benefit is the holacratic constitution, which documents the essential rules, structures and processes of the holacracy "operating system" for the leadership and management of the organisation. It forms the foundation of an organisation that wants to use holacracy. Roles are documented and recorded outside the constitution. For this end, Mein Grundeinkommen employs the digital software Holaspirit, although this is merely one possible method of documenting holacratic roles. Thereby, individuals who take on a role know the extent to which they can make autonomous decisions and what responsibilities they must fulfil. This clarity helps to avoid conflicts or misunderstandings and allows the constitution to be flexible and adaptable to new circumstances.

A further significant potential lies in the transparency achieved through the implementation of governance structures, extending beyond decision-making processes to encompass salary structures and related decisions. In practice, monthly club meetings, which are informal gatherings rather than formal general assemblies, allow each circle to present updates on current activities, changes being implemented, future directions, and progress. By making these elements visible and understandable to all members of the organisation, a culture of trust and accountability is fostered, where employees feel more informed and engaged in the company's operations.

The greatest potential, according to Maximilian Hoffmann, lies in the high level of autonomy and freedom that members of *Mein Grundeinkommen* enjoy. Maximilian Hoffmann emphasises, "I have never felt so free in a company before." Every individual is free to decide which roles they want to take on or create and in which areas of the organisation they wish to participate. The high degree of autonomy also impacts decision-making processes, as decisions made independently by individuals can be faster and more efficient. Maximilian Hoffmann explains,

“when I am active in my domain, for example in software development, I can make decisions independently as long as they are within my domain, without needing to consult extensively with others.”

This goes along with inclusiveness and possibilities of participation, meaning “you have the opportunity to take part in everything, ultimately to become part of the circles”. This strongly supports *Mein Grundeinkommen*'s internal focus on distributive fairness.

## Challenges Arising from Designing Governance around Holacracy

During the initial implementation of holacracy, the following challenges emerged:

The perception of leadership within the organisation presented significant challenges. Many people, accustomed to hierarchical systems and receiving instructions, viewed Lead Links as de facto leaders. However, these roles are not intended to give orders and do not have directive authority.

Coordinating between roles is also challenging, as different roles often have divergent goals, potentially leading to conflicts. Even in a task-divided environment, ensuring that the goals of various roles align remains a challenge, making close coordination among team members essential.

One of the most significant challenges for *Mein Grundeinkommen* arises from the conflicts between holacracy as an organisational structure and the legal form of an association. The difficulty lies in reconciling these two structures, which operate on different principles. The association functions as a democratic construct, with the general assembly acting as the central body that elects the board and leads the community. Alongside this democratic level, the holacratic structure emphasises self-organisation and involves less collective management. This results in an ongoing negotiation process at *Mein Grundeinkommen* regarding the balance between collective and autonomous decision-making. These conflicts are also evident in the legal responsibilities that rest with the board, leading to discrepancies within the organisation. As a first step towards resolving these issues, *Mein Grundeinkommen* introduced Special Representatives, as mentioned earlier, who bring the personal level into the association context and can better distribute responsibilities.

Related to this is the challenge of missing collective decision-making processes within self-organisation. Holacracy lacks a clear method for making collective decisions, with the consent method often perceived as inadequate for strategic and planning decisions. Maximilian Hoffmann explains,

“Consent means that someone makes a proposal, others can raise objections, and those objections must somehow be integrated. However, this process can theoret-

ically take months, depending on how difficult it is to reach an agreement. That's why consent can sometimes seem quick, because at some point people might stop raising objections, either because they're tired of the process, find it too difficult, or want to avoid conflict. In such cases, things might move faster, but certain interests and perspectives may no longer be heard because people are discouraged from participating."

He emphasises,

"what I see here is a bit of the difference between democratic decision-making and individual autonomous decision-making. You could say that holacracy is somewhat based on the idea that if everyone looks out for themselves, then everyone is taken care of. But that's only true to a certain extent. It's similar to how markets work—when everyone acts in their own interest, they try to get the best outcome for themselves. However, what's missing in this approach is the level of community and collective responsibility."

Consequently, structural problems can result in responsibility being shifted to individuals due to the absence of a collective decision process within holacracy.

Employees also face personal challenges, especially when it comes to making decisions. Integrative decision-making processes require individuals to be willing to engage in conflict Maximilian Hoffmann tells,

"a consent-based decision is usually centred on individuals. I make a proposal, and then we check if anyone in the group has objections. If someone does, there's an immediate conflict between two people—not necessarily involving everyone. This means that holacracy requires a certain willingness to engage in conflict. Some people are less comfortable with conflict, and that's perfectly fine. However, I believe this system tends to favour those who are more willing to engage in conflict, which may also include people who enjoy competition, are outspoken, or are extroverted. It's important to be mindful that this dynamic doesn't end up shaping the entire organisational culture."

## Interactions with Other Design Traits

### Network Design

The self-organised and decentralised structures at *Mein Grundeinkommen* positively impact its network and the relationships with business partners. Maximilian Hoffmann highlights that business partners recognise that the individuals they interact with have decision-making authority and competence within the organisation,

eliminating the need to refer to higher management levels. This enables faster decision-making, a process to which many people are unaccustomed. Maximilian Hoffmann explains:

“when we organised the Congress of Society<sup>1</sup> last year, if a decision needed to be made, people were more used to saying, ‘Okay, good idea, good suggestion. I’ll discuss it with my supervisor or manager.’ But that doesn’t happen with us. If the person involved shares the same perspective and we reach a similar conclusion, the decision is simply made on the spot. I think these are small moments where holacracy or self-organisation has a noticeable impact on the relationships we have with others.”

## Ownership Design

Talking about ownership in the legal form of a not-for-profit registered association under German law requires some clarification. The association as a whole can be regarded as the owner, for example of money raised through crowdfunding, but not the individual members of the association. It is important to emphasise that the funds must be used for the charitable purpose of the association as stated in the articles of association.

The governance structures and their successful implementation at *Mein Grundeinkommen* are closely linked to the organisation’s legal form, as it determines participation opportunities, decision-making authority, and the allocation of responsibility. Hoffman emphasises that “the ownership structure of organisations is extremely important”. The choice of ownership structure forms the foundation for decision-making processes within the organisation. In critical moments, the right ownership structure ensures that important decisions are not left to a single individual in a leadership role who might not act in the best interest of the company.

For other organisations looking to adopt similar governance approaches, Maximilian Hoffmann recommends carefully considering the ownership structure to prevent decision-making from being concentrated in the hands of a few. The ownership structure has also impacted *Mein Grundeinkommen*’s salary system, as it may conflict with the organisation’s not-for-profit status. Since the organisation is entirely funded by donations, and maintaining its not-for-profit status requires responsible use of these donations, salary increases have to consider that according to the tax office, administrative expenses for not-for-profit organisations must re-

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1 The “Kongress der Gesellschaft” (Congress of Society) by *Mein Grundeinkommen* is an annual event that first took place in 2023. It brings together experts from politics, economics, and society to discuss social justice, income distribution, and Unconditional Basic Income. The goal is to promote public debate on social security and explore practical solutions.

main below 50% of income and there must be no disproportionality in salaries (i.e. no disproportion between remuneration and work performance).

## Recommendations for Adopting a Holacracy-Based Governance Design

According to Maximilian Hoffmann, the key success factor for implementing innovative governance approaches is how ownership structures are organised within the organisation, as these structures ultimately determine who has the power and authority to make important decisions. In traditional organisational forms, such as a GmbH<sup>2</sup>, ownership stakes often give certain individuals the ability to veto decisions or override the collective will of the organisation. This concentration of power can undermine the effectiveness of innovative governance approaches like holacracy, which rely on the decentralisation of decision-making. This means owners or CEOs can overrule decisions due to their ownership rights, regardless of any supposedly flat or self-organised structure. In such cases, self-organisation can become merely an illusion if the owner has ultimate veto power.

To avoid these issues, Maximilian Hoffmann advises organisations to consider alternative ownership structures that align with their governance model. For example, cooperative models or not-for-profit companies offer more democratic and equitable decision-making processes, where power is distributed more evenly among members. By aligning ownership structures with governance models, organisations can ensure that decision-making processes are truly collaborative and that the principles of self-organisation and decentralisation are upheld.

To support employees, especially through personal challenges arising from decision-making processes at *Mein Grundeinkommen*, the organisation offers tools such as non-violent communication<sup>3</sup>, coaching, and workshops on interpersonal interactions, and mediation sessions. The implementation of partnership agreements, which define cultural aspects and behaviour within the organisation, along with the previously mentioned support structures, helps to improve interpersonal relationships and contributes to successful interactions.

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- 2 GmbH stands for Gesellschaft mit beschränkter Haftung, meaning “company with limited liability.” It is a common legal business structure in German-speaking countries, similar to a Limited Liability Company (LLC) in the U.S. or a private limited company (Ltd.) in the UK.
  - 3 Nonviolent Communication (NVC) is a communication method developed by Marshall Rosenberg that encourages empathetic dialogue by focusing on observations, feelings, needs, and requests, with the goal of fostering understanding and reducing conflict.

## Inspiring Redesign Beyond the Business

Through its purpose in particular, *Mein Grundeinkommen* aims to build a more just and equitably distributed society by introducing a universal basic income. Maximilian Hoffmann emphasises that the

“idea of attraction rather than pressure [...] is most effective [...], meaning to inspire people with an idea and draw them towards it, rather than imposing an idea on them and telling them, ‘This is what you should do.’”

The organisation's strategy is based on convincing people through positive examples and voluntary participation rather than imposing ideas. This approach is reflected in the successful implementation of lotteries and pilot studies, demonstrating that alternative systems are possible and beneficial. The ultimate goal is to garner broad support to achieve political majorities for its implementation. Not only does *Mein Grundeinkommen* express a commitment to a distributive approach, but it also embodies this through its governance design. This is achieved by fostering a high degree of autonomy, providing extensive participation opportunities for its members, ensuring transparency, and striving to implement an innovative salary model that compensates employees based on their needs. In doing so, *Mein Grundeinkommen* serves as a role model, contributing to the transformation of the economic model.

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