Variable structure - dynamic network as an effective alternative to the hierarchical construction of socio-political organizations

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Abstract:
The publication focuses on a number of negative processes that develop in hierarchical socio-political organizations after their creation that together make up the “iron law of oligarchy” by Michels.

As an alternative to the hierarchical structure the author suggests the dynamic network – variable structure of socio-political organizations that regulates and keeps free of conflicts the interaction of all its members by their cyclic restructuring into little groups of different functional designation according to a certain algorithm that ensures production, coordination and taking of collective decisions by the members from the positions of “equal-to-equal” and their implementation in a complex of temporary hierarchical project, executive and process groups headed by executors in charge.

The publication describes in detail every step of the algorithm of cyclic restructuring in the dynamic network, provides the basic scheme of construction of a national level socio-political organization with variable structure, presents the self-government concept of such an organization and corresponding activity methodology, and suggests a strategy of its quantitative increase.
A self-governing dynamic network [1] devoid of a managing nucleus is designed to organize a purposeful synchronized activity of large groups of people as an alternative to the rigid hierarchy that serves as the basis of most existing socio-political organizations.

Let us consider the construction and activity processes of a typical socio-political organization. When a number of active citizens meet and they share similar views of the actions to be undertaken to improve the society, to make it better, more humane and fair, they establish an NGO that with time stands a chance to develop into a massive movement or a political party.

The membership of such NGOs may subsequently increase. The increase rate depends on the demand for the ideas enunciated by its policy documents. When the number of members exceeds 15–20 individuals, the organization loses the ability to effectively generate, adapt and carry out decisions aimed at achieving the declared objectives.

This makes the organization members resort to a hierarchical structure. As a rule, they choose the Administrative Board and the Head who are supposed to generate and make the key decisions. It is implied that the other organization members will carry them out obediently.
Under these circumstances, important information circulates only within the managing nucleus, while common members receive it in pieces, i.e. it is fragmented, which prevents them from seeing the comprehensive picture of what is going on. This is why they eventually focus their attention on other interesting things happening around them.

This, as well as the complex impact of a number of group effects and processes that develop in small and large groups in the framework of group dynamics, leads to growing passivity of most rank-and-file members, to lack of motivation to carry out the leaders’ decisions and actively participate in the activities of the socio-political organization.

Even if the organization goes on with its activities due to the charisma and energy of its leaders, its hierarchical construction, however, entails bureaucratization of its top in accordance with the "iron law of oligarchy" by Robert Michels [2]. Apart from this, information monopoly gives the leaders the opportunity to manipulate with available options, for instance, to knowingly offer during meetings, conferences or conventions the decisions that are only beneficial to the managing nucleus.

It should be pointed out that this behavioural scheme is conditioned by the position of the leaders in this peculiar role play invariably replicated by the hierarchical structure rather that by their personal traits.

Another major drawback of socio-political organizations is their being extremely prone to falling under external control. This happens when a more dominant organization seizes the power by influencing the leader or certain members of the managing nucleus in a number of ways.

It should also be pointed out that people who rise vertically in such hierarchical organizations are usually far from the best, since members with more varied behavioural
schemes stand a better chance of advancing themselves as they are ready to do it, regardless of any moral and ethical constraints.

Apart from the above mentioned drawbacks, there are a number of other downsides including its innovation disability [3]. Together they initiate more or less intensive development of the degradation process of Ukrainian political parties and NGOs, their never-ending splits, marginalization and, as a result, denigration of democracy and discrediting of the very idea of civil society.

The described problems have recurred in different socio-political organizations for all of the human history as a result of the lack of understanding or suppression of the faults of the hierarchical construction.

Social and psychological effects and processes that take place in self-organizing and organizing groups as well as their mutual influence and interdependence from the point of view of the systematic approach is described in detail in the author’s publication [4].

It is natural that active citizens when entering political parties or NGOs are never told about the "iron law of oligarchy" by Michels. However it is described in many political science handbooks for higher education institutions.

The hierarchical structure of socio-political organizations, by the way, is secured by the Ukrainian legislation in the form of compulsory requirements to their statutes.

The dominance of hierarchy in the structure of all the downstream links of socio-political organizations is in effect this System which calls for quality changes by introduction of a network element and its consolidation through certain types of statutory activity.

One alternative to the hierarchical structure is a self-governing dynamic network, without the managing nucleus, designed for the purpose of organizing
effective synchronized work of big groups of people in the framework of socio-political organizations.

**DYNAMIC NETWORK** is a variable structure of socio-political organizations that regulates and maintains free of conflicts the interaction of all its members by their cyclic restructuring into little groups of different functional designation according to a certain algorithm that ensures production, coordination and taking of collective decisions by the members from the positions of “equal-to-equal” and their implementation in a complex of temporary hierarchical project, executive and process groups headed by executors in charge (scheme 1).

![Scheme 1. Dynamic network – variable structure of socio-political organizations.](image)

Taking into account the fact that decisions in a socio-political organization can be produced and taken only by those who have all the necessary information, the participation might be divided into three levels:

The 1st level – organization members that regularly take part in Meetings and produce, coordinate, take and execute all the decisions;

The 2nd level – candidates for membership who can participate in Meetings if they will with the right of advisory vote and take part in executing some decisions;
The 3rd level – followers interested in the activity of the organization and if they want to they might participate in the events it arranges in the framework of its statutory activity.

The basic element or basic knot of a socio-political organization with a variable structure, i.e., dynamic network, is an oblast unit (scheme 2). The reason for this first of all lies in the fact that only on the oblast level is it possible to generate large enough membership, which in the framework of their Meeting will be capable of collective intellectual activity, i.e., generation, coordination and taking decisions concerning all the directions of policy documents of the organization. Secondly, the oblast level is the best in terms of ensuring personal participation in the work of the Meeting of its members from raion centers and other small towns and villages due to the fact that it is geographically convenient to come to oblast centers for them. Thirdly, the oblast level might be absolutely self-sufficient in terms of self-financing, self-governing and support of all the necessary internal processes of the organization’s functioning. The central knot, i.e., the coordination center, coordinates the positions of all the oblast organizations concerning all the directions or activity profiles of the socio-political organization and implements other functions delegated by oblast centers in accordance with policy documents. Every oblast center delegates one representative for each activity direction to the coordination center; and these representatives are altered after a certain period by way of rotation. The construction and activity algorithms of the coordination center correspond to the construction and activity algorithms of oblast centers, which is described in detail below. This is why construction of a socio-political organization with variable structure, i.e., dynamic network, might begin from any knot. If its activity is successful, all the other knots are constructed in accordance with the structure of the initial “crystallization center”.
The smallest number of members of an oblast unit of a socio-political organization with variable structure cannot be less than 12 persons, which is conditioned by specific features of the work algorithm of a dynamic network. The maximum number of such an oblast unit in the framework of the given algorithm is up to 70 persons. When the number of members equates to 12 the oblast unit starts its activity in three directions with each of them being developed by 4 members. When the number of unit members rises, the number of those working on specific directions can increase to 10–14 persons and the number of directions can rise to 5–7. The increase of oblast unit members to a couple of hundred or even thousand persons and their collective work without diminishing the quality of the organization is possible only after making the algorithm more complicated and restructuring the dynamic network, which will be discussed in the presentations below.
It is worth mentioning that today the real number of members of oblast units of Ukrainian political movements or parties that actually participate in the processes of decision making, taking and implementing is from 1 to 15 persons.

Let us examine the algorithm of activity of an oblast unit of a socio-political organization with variable structure, i.e. dynamic network according to the John Boyd's OODA loop [5]. The regularity of arranging general Meetings is twice a week. Twice a year a general Meeting lasting for a couple of days will be held aimed at arranging collective strategic planning, as well as amending and coordinating policy documents. As it has already been mentioned, all the decisions in an oblast unit are produced, coordinated and taken at the general Meeting in a dynamic network that coordinates and maintains free of conflicts interaction of all the members by their cyclic restructuring into little groups of different functional designation according to a certain algorithm that ensures production and taking collective decisions from the position of “equal-to-equal”.

With this purpose the participants of the general Meeting of an oblast unit structure themselves into little groups of more or less equal number in accordance with their competence per directions, activity profiles or other criteria determined by the type of tasks to be performed.

The first step of the work has the form of a plenary meeting (scheme 3) where executors in charge of project, executive and process groups report about the implementation of the previous decisions of general Meetings of the oblast unit. The duration of the first step is 10 to 30 minutes and depends on the number of speakers and the scope of their reports.
Scheme 3. General meeting in a dynamic network: reports of executors at the plenary meeting.

The second step of work is performed in special-purpose groups by the method of brain storming (scheme 4) when the participants discuss tasks and generate alternatives or decision components without analyzing then critically. This permits to virtually avoid conflicts, which positively influences the relations among the participants and encourages creative self-realization of each of them.

The work at the second step results in generating a list of alternatives or decision components suggested by the group. The duration of the second step is 20 to 30 minutes and depends on the complexity of questions under consideration.
Further the oblast unit members structure themselves into cross-groups (scheme 5), where each participant represents his/her own special-purpose group. Here they in turn report on the alternatives or decision components generated in special-purpose groups and in the process of discussion they receive remarks, criticism, advice, amendments, new alternatives or decision components from their colleagues. Work in cross-groups corresponds to the second stage of the brain storming procedure – discussion of the generated alternatives or decision components in groups with other participants. The special feature of this step is objective criticism of alternatives or decision components from the impersonalized list by cross-group participants – since they didn’t take part in generating these alternatives, they have no personal interest in advancing one of them so as to reinforce their rank. Under such conditions the speaker
has a chance to estimate the colleagues’ attitude to each of the alternatives or decision components they represent regardless of their source, as well as receive additional information in the process of discussion. Moreover, in cross-groups everyone in turn works as a representative of his/her own special-purpose group and as an expert who along with colleagues discusses the reports of other participants.

Scheme 5. General meeting in a dynamic network: discussion of alternatives in cross-groups.

Since every speaker represents the ideas of his special-purpose group (i.e. a set of produced alternatives or decision components) no participant of the cross-group can make the speaker change them due to irrational factors – such as his charisma, authority or psychological and emotional influence. Even the collective opinion of the cross-group cannot predominate over the opinion of the special-purpose group since the latter consists of the most competent members of the given special-purpose direction.
The described division of role positions of the interaction of cross-group participants and the algorithm of their alteration rules out conflicts that accompany the ranking process or in other words appearance of informal leaders, stabilizes the dynamics of social and psychological processes in the group, provides every participant of the primary unit with a chance to rationally influence the formation of decisions on the stage of discussing alternatives or their components and also lets all the participants form their own attitude to each alternative or decision component based on the analysis of all available information that freely circulates in the organization as well as on results of comparison of the positions of different groups in general and positions of each colleague in particular. The duration of the third step is 30 to 60 minutes and depends on the number and complexity of the questions under consideration.

The next step is carried out in the primary special-purpose groups (scheme 6), where the participants generalize, discuss and coordinate all the information generated in cross-groups and based on it produce a project of final decision.

The specific feature of work at this stage is a radical change of the participants’ status – this time each of them represents their cross-group, which reinforces his position and levels the pressure both on the part of potential informal leaders and group pressure in general, and this lets avoid the necessity to manifest conformism. Thus every participant is empowered to actively oppose even recognized authorities, which would be impossible in a group with classic dynamics of development of socio-psychological processes. The duration of the fourth step is 20 to 40 minutes and depends on the complexity of special questions.
Scheme 6. General meeting in a dynamic network: generation of decision projects in special purpose groups.

The final step is carried out in the regime of a plenary meeting (scheme 7) where representatives of special-purpose groups present agreed decision projects that are put to vote without discussion and are adopted by the qualified majority of 2/3 or 3/4 depending on the statutory requirements for this or that type of decisions. The duration of the fifth step is 20 to 40 minutes and depends on the number and scope of decision projects.

Every decision project and the decision itself should include the following information:

1. Short title of the decision.
2. Content and substantiation of the decision.
3. Implementation deadlines.
4. Resources necessary for the implementation.

5. An executor in charge and a list of project, executive and process groups.

6. Estimation of the conformity of the decision to the organization’s policy documents – Objective, Mission, Values, Strategies, Aims and/or Activity Plans.

7. Implementation criteria.

8. Date of reporting at the general Meeting about the process of decision implementation or its termination.

Scheme 7. General meeting in a dynamic network: Approval of decisions at the plenary meeting.

Implementation of adopted decisions takes place between general Meetings after restructuring the unit members into temporary hierarchical project, executive and
process groups whose activity is based on the principles of modern project and process management.

Scheme 8. Implementation of decisions in the dynamic network in project groups.

Project groups (scheme 8) work on generation, analysis and improvement of various documents, concepts, laws, etc in different activity directions of the socio-political organization. They usually include organization members who are competent in a certain sphere, as well as qualified in related activity directions.

Executive groups (scheme 9) implement the decisions that embrace a wide spectrum of activities in the framework of operative, tactical and strategic plans aimed at dissemination and propaganda of policy documents of the socio-political organization and facilitate implementation of other activity types indicated in the Statute. Apart from geographical executive groups in oblast towns and villages, there are also executive
groups of mixed composition in accordance with the nature of decisions adopted by the general Meeting.

Scheme 9. Implementation of decisions in the dynamic network in executive groups.

Process groups (scheme 10) ensure the development of:

- Basic processes of internal restructuring and their regularity;
- Processes of work with human resources: selection and adoption of new members, their training, exclusion of those who breach norms and rules of the organization culture;
- Processes of transparent circulation of information inside the organization as well as between the organization and environment;
- Processes of internal activity: resource provision, organization and technological support, methodological support;
Processes of CONTROL over:

- decision implementation;
- execution of strategic, tactical and operative plans;
- conformity of the activity of the organization in general and its separate subdivisions to the content and sense of policy documents;
- level of trust in real time to organization members elected and appointed to responsible positions;
- conformity of the internal activity processes to the provisions of policy documents;
- internal assessment of the organization in general, its policy documents and activity by selected Subjects of internal assessment.

Scheme 10. Implementation of decisions in the dynamic network in process groups.
Unlike temporary executive and project groups where candidates for membership and followers of the organization can work during the entire period of their activity, process groups include only organization members that change after their appointment period is over according to the Statute by way of rotation.

**WARNING.** Protection of the dynamic network members from irrational deliberate or unconscious manipulative influence on the part of its charismatic members and correspondingly from the danger of establishment of external management is ensured due to a conscious decisive refusal to discuss any questions and listen to any personal speeches at plenary meetings of any organization members apart from those who report the results of work of special-purpose, project, executive or process groups and such speeches are not provided for in the algorithm of work of the Meeting.

It is only the moderator of the dynamic network, who can speak in front of a large group at the Meeting, but he does not participate personally in discussing the content of the agenda, the only thing he does is coordinate the participants’ work during restructuring into special-purpose and cross groups.

The date and time of holding general Meetings and their moderators are always appointed at the previous Meeting by a separate resolution. The agenda of a regular meeting is determined by special-purpose group participants in accordance with approved plans of their activity.

The key parameter of socio-political organizations with variable structure, i.e., dynamic network, that defines its main qualities and characteristics is the management concept chosen by organizers; or to be more precise for the given structure it is a self-management structure and corresponding activity methodology.

The management concept of the most effective modern organizations – corporations is strategic management that makes it possible to adopt it as the basis of
activity of socio-political organizations with variable structure, i.e., dynamic network [6].

In case of implementation of strategic management by socio-political organizations it is necessary to define the Objective, Mission and Strategy both for the management Object, i.e., Ukrainian society, and for the organization itself as its integral part taking into account the Objective and Mission of the entire mankind. Such an approach is conditioned by the fact that a socio-political organization, on the one hand, is an integral part of the management Object, i.e., social system, and on the other hand, to realize the management it has to get out of this system, that is to say, to acquire Subjectness on a higher level and become a full-fledged player in the supersystem. In case when the management Object is Ukrainian society that in its turn constitutes a part of the entire humanity, the organization has to acquire Subjectness of the global level and correspondingly to become a full-fledged global player. Ideally in the picture of the future the management Object itself, i.e., Ukrainian society, has to turn into a global level Subject, acquiring integral subjectness as a result of combination of the subjectness components of a number of socio-political organizations of the described type. On the other hand, when the picture of the future contains no vision of the organization itself or its role and place are not predefined, when the future comes it will not be there and as a result it will not be able to implement its Mission.

Thus the methodology of activity of a socio-political organization that applies strategic management consists in multiple repetition of inter-enclosed cycles of defining, improving, coordination and correction of the succession of its elements – Objective, Values, Mission, Strategies, Aims, Plans, practical actions for their implementation and control of reaction of the external and internal environment to such actions. Let us examine it more in detail at scheme 1.
Scheme 11. Principles of work of a socio-political organization with variable structure, i.e., dynamic network.

Organization members at the general Meeting in the framework of an orderly self-governing network that keeps the participants’ interaction at the position of equal-to-equal, monitor the internal and external environments and the results of their analysis provide the basis for strategic management, they help to determine the Objective of activity, Values, Mission, Strategies and Aims. On this basis, the Meeting participants generate, coordinate and approve strategic, tactical and operative Plans which distribute all the work necessary to attain the Aims among project, executive and process groups. In-between the meetings, organization members restructure themselves into a complex of corresponding temporary hierarchical groups and under the leadership of executors in charge implement tasks defined in the Plans. At the same time they monitor the response of the external environment and changes in the internal environment and every time after analysing its results during the work of the next Meeting review and if
necessary amend the content of strategic management elements. The endless repetition of the described cycle constitutes the methodology of activity of socio-political organizations with variable structure, i.e., dynamic network.

Thus elements of strategic management elements – Objective, Values, Mission, Strategies, Aims and plans – are formulated, improved and tested during the entire period of existence of the organization. That is to say one should not attempt to formulate these elements ideally and comprehensively at the moment of its creation. The continuous process of their improvement, coordination and practical verification is itself the methodology of activity of a socio-political organization and its every stage takes its members to a new level of comprehension and understanding of Reality.

The main strategy of quantitative increase of a socio-political organization with variable structure, i.e., dynamic network, is adsorption of the best activists of the existing socio-political organization as a result of providing opportunities for creative self-realization for each of them on condition of warm, free of conflicts and friendly relations among all the members and subdivisions of the organization in general. The source of quantitative increase of the members of the organization with variable structure, i.e., dynamic network, is their collective work at the general Meeting exclusively in the framework of a large group, which lets involve active and competent activists from the outside, i.e., potential new members of the organization. It is worth pointing out that this is impossible to implement in the framework of a little group, since informal leaders that manifest themselves there will never tolerate its expansion due to appearance of active and competent activists as the latter will endanger their personal leadership positions as well as formal and informal statuses.
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