Application details

If you wish to apply for this specific position, please apply through the normal application process but indicate in your cover level which project you are interested in and that you would like to work with Dr Hewett. Please contact Dr Hewett for content-related questions about these topics.

Supervisor: Dr R. Hewett https://www.rsm.nl/people/bex-hewett/

People and self-managing organisations

Self-managing organisations (SMOs) "radically decentralize authority in a formal and systematic way throughout the organization" (Lee & Edmondson, 2017, p.39). SMOs are often therefore characterised by an (apparent) lack of formal hierarchy, or at least far less hierarchy, when it comes to the relationship between employees and managers. In many SMOs traditional management roles (e.g., recruiting and selecting staff, coaching and development, pay decisions, performance feedback) are carried out outside of a formal hierarchy, by peers or individuals with non-hierarchical relationships, and may be distributed between multiple individuals.

 "In self-managing organizations, all employees hold well- defined decision rights that cannot be superseded by someone simply because s/he is the "boss." (ibid.) which means that employees are often explicitly or implicitly given more autonomy to shape their work and their role(s) within the organisation. The motivation for organisations moving towards self-management is not always clear, but my preliminary research indicates that some companies are driven by people-centric goals, others because the company founders reject the identity of being a "manager" and see them as an unnecessary part of their organisation.

The *People and Self-Management Organisations* research project is interested in the experience of people working in this kind of organisations, in any kind of role. Some of the existing research questions we are exploring can be seen via the project website.

I am keen to work with part-time PhD students who work in or with SMOs on a wide range of topics on this phenomenon. I can supervise projects making use of either/or quantitative or qualitative methods (depending on the research questions). I am also interested in topics which touch on how SMOs fit in broader society (e.g., relating to topics such as steward ownership).

Suggested reading

Start here:

Lee, M. Y., & Edmondson, A. C. (2017). Self-managing organizations: Exploring the limits of less-hierarchical organizing. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, *37*, 35–58. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.riob.2017.10.002

Hewett et al. (2025) "Stories of Self-Management" (practitioner white paper). https://www.rsm.nl/fileadmin/About_RSM/Discovery/Documents/Stories_of_high_involvement_-_white_paper__Nov_2024_.pdf

Other recent, relevant papers:

Huettermann, H., Berger, S., Reinwald, M., & Bruch, H. (2024). Power to the people—And then? A multilevel leadership perspective on organizational decentralization. *Human Resource Management*, *n/a*(n/a). https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.22203

Lee, M. Y. (2024). Enacting Decentralized Authority: The Practices and Limits of Moving Beyond Hierarchy. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 00018392241257372. https://doi.org/10.1177/00018392241257372

Martela, F. (2022). Managers matter less than we think: How can organizations function without any middle management? *Journal of Organization Design*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s41469-022-00133-7

Puranam, P. (2022). Deflating the rhetoric around "flat firms". *Journal of Organization Design*, *11*(1), 15–17. https://doi.org/10.1007/s41469-022-00114-w