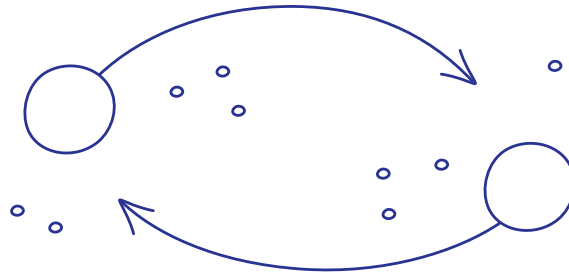


PLATFORM LONDON

What is a socially just waging system?

How to approach money in a horizontally run organisation?



What is the relation between wage levels and democracy?

Platform London combines art, activism, education and research in one organisation. Their current campaigns focus on the social, economic and environmental impacts of the global oil industry. For 20 years Platform has used a socially just waging system for salaried staff. This system is one part of a continual process of addressing issues of equality, power and privilege within the organisation and wider society.

How is Platform organised?

James Marriot: Within our collective Platform we bring together people from the arts, social sciences and activism to make work which provokes and helps to bring about a more socially and ecologically just society.

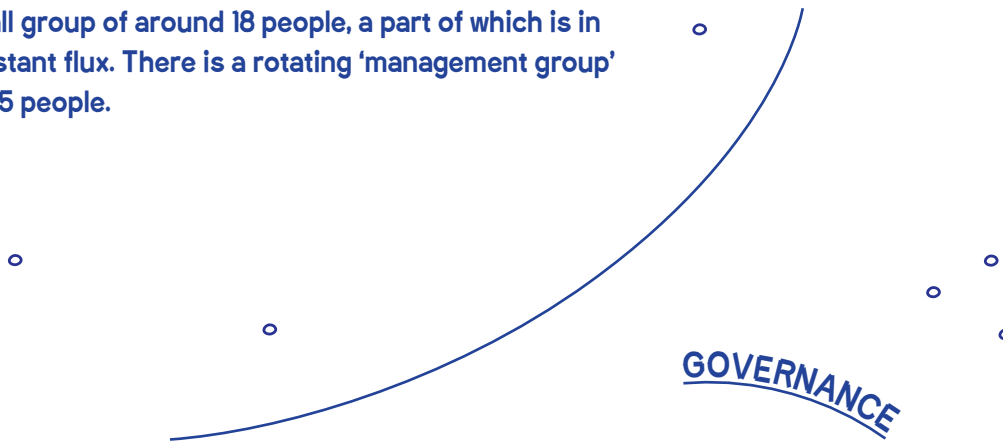
Being an artist, I tend to look at Platform as a sculpture, or to use the Beuysian term a social sculpture: all of the people involved in it are in the process of creating an organism – constantly creating and recreating it. Sometimes people ask ‘who founded Platform?’, and I find it interesting to answer that it was founded not in 1983 but two years ago by somebody who joined recently. Platform is constantly being founded and refounded, constantly changing shape.

Another way in which I personally like to look at it is this: we’re used to being involved in institutions such as

schools or large organisations, where we have to adapt ourselves to their shape. Whereas what we’re trying to do is to say it’s a malfunction if the school or organisation doesn’t adapt to you. If someone comes to work in Platform for a few years, by the time this person moves on to do something else Platform should have taken on that person’s form in some way or another. People should be able to look at Platform and go ‘Yeah, I changed the shape of that’, just in the same way as you change a house or apartment. That’s the way at which I personally like to look at how Platform organically evolves. We try to ensure that all decisions are made by the group, the key decisions are made by all the staff body at any one time. We discuss things thoroughly and it takes time. Sometimes this drives people nuts, but our view is that democracy is more important than speed. But because we also have to be able to move rapidly in relation to the rest of the world, we have created a ‘management group’. That is a group of about four or five people: people rotate into the management group and they then deal with the ongoing issues. So for example, some dear colleague’s father died last week, we’re sad for her but it also brings organisational issues that go with that. She needs to take compassionate leave for a month or two so we need to spread her work out. That kind of reorganising has to be done quickly. She needs to leave feeling that somebody will take on her job. So the management group has that function of dealing with such issues quickly.

GROUP/ACTORS

It is a system for salaried staff within the organisation. A small group of around 18 people, a part of which is in a constant flux. There is a rotating 'management group' of 4 - 5 people.



GOVERNANCE

Can be actuated within any legal form. All decisions are taken by the group in horizontal form. The management group has the function of dealing with ongoing pressing organisational issues. Each person in the group is paid the same base rate, irrespective of years of experience. Salaries vary according to a person's wealth and care duties.

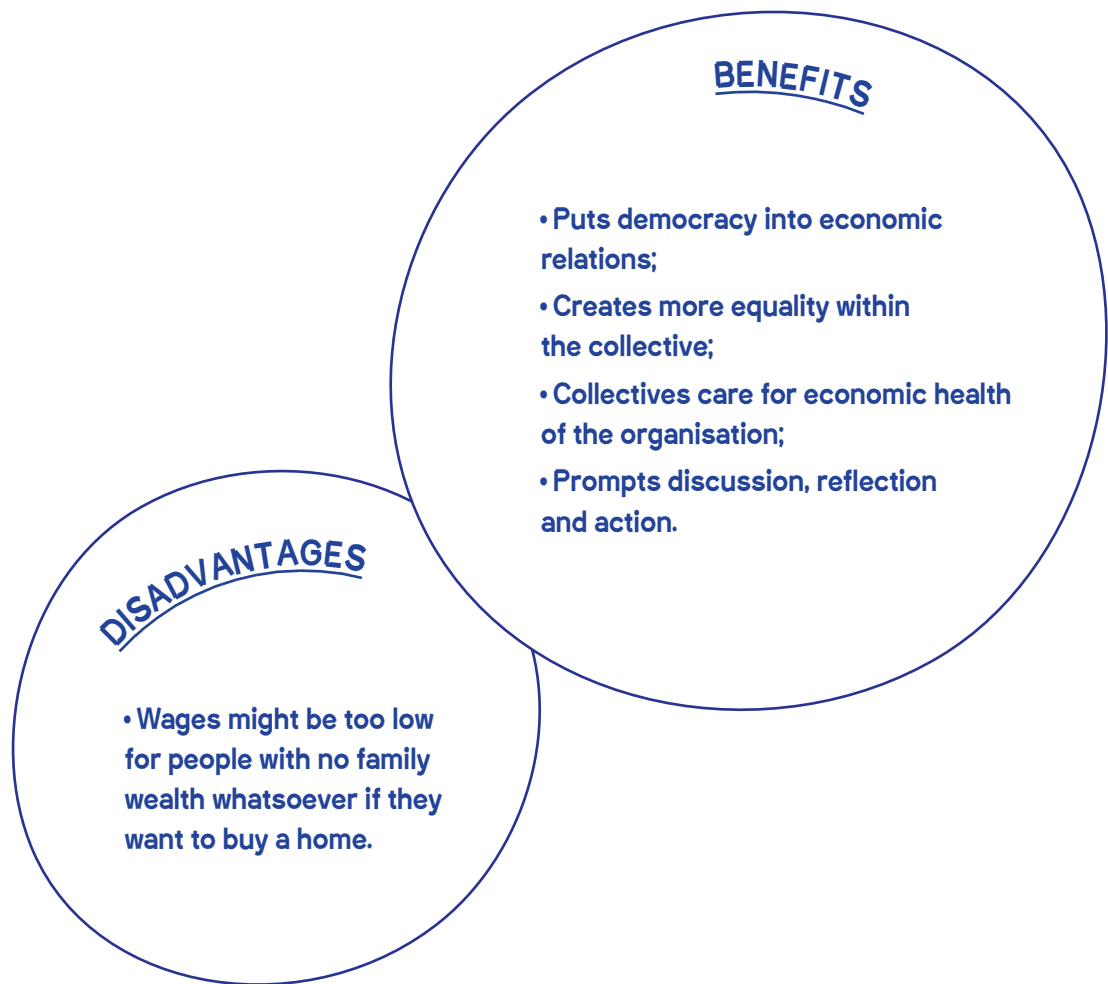
After you've been involved in Platform for nine months you rotate into the management group. Ideally people are on it for a year or so and then rotate off it. Therefore, it constantly changes and everybody is involved in it. It's a way of giving people a sense of ownership. This is your house. It's your building, your sculpture. Take control and responsibility over it and feel a right over it. Platform doesn't work as an organisation if people don't want to take control of it. I'm not saying it suits everybody but it doesn't work if people just come along and don't dwell in it. They have to take control.

How does your horizontal way of organising shape Platform's relation to money?

Our sense of equality of ownership and control in the decision making sphere also has to reach into the economic sphere. We're currently speaking about 18 people within Platform and a yearly turnover of about \$00.000£. Everyone in Platform is involved in pulling in money. We teach each other how to encourage others to give us money. We get it from trusts and foundations. We are a charity and basically that means you get tax benefits if you give Platform money. We also get money from the state, in some form or other. For example, we are currently part of an EU project and get funding for that. At times we also get funding from the UK Arts Council. We get support from individual donors. Lastly, we also get money from earned income for speaking at events

and other activities. That makes four different strands of income with which we generate roughly 400.000£ a year. We have been relatively stable at that level for about ten years. And personally, I'm not interested in us growing hugely, I'm more interested in a steady state. What we need is a security to be able to do what we do, not to get bigger. So that's the income side. Then there's the question of how we distribute the money between each other. Not everybody within Platform is on the same wage level or the same number of days. Some people are on four days a week, some people on two days a week. Largely that's because of people's desires and other obligations in life. We however set our wages according to what we call in a rather grand way the socially just waging system. This was first created in the early 2000s by Greg Muttit and Dan Gretton. It basically works like this: everybody is paid an equal wage regardless of age and their role within it. Because of the way we're structured as a flat organisation, we don't have a director or a chief executive and so there is no reason to have pay differentials. But once you start digging into it, you start to realise that the same amount of pay buys different amounts of liberty and joy for different people depending on their circumstances.

So we have what we call increments and de-increments: everybody is paid on a standard level, which is a base rate of about 35.000£ a year. If then, for example, you have children, you have dependents and you get an



increase. As I don't have kids, have inherited some money and own the house in which I live, I get paid less. This way we attempt to get closer to real equality.

What are the effects the socially just waging system is producing within Platform?

There are some interesting things that come as byproducts of this system, because it requires people to be open and trust each other. We have never run into a situation where somebody has lied, as far as I know. When you come to work at Platform, already in the application process we make it very clear how you are going to be paid – with materials that you can look at. Once you get the job, you go to the finance director and speak about your own situation. From that conversation, your wage level will be set. And it can alter as your circumstances change – perhaps you have a child, or inherit something. The good thing is, you know that your time is being valued the same as the one of the other people you are working side by side with. This approach also slightly delinks the relationship between money and productivity. You're paid a flat wage, whether you do lots of stuff or don't. Sometimes people tease us and say 'You bloody communists', and I'm quite proud of that. Sometimes I jokingly say that Platform is the last outpost of the Soviet Union, because basically, the only way you lose the job is by the whole ship going down. We're all in this together. An interesting aspect to that is that because we're all

paid and structured the same, if we hit financial problems, we have to deal with it together. Two and a half years ago, things were looking pretty dodgy and we had to sit around carefully and ask what we were going to do about it. Now, in a conventional situation, the head of HR or the chief executive would go ahead and lay off different people. To some extent we can make cuts by reducing certain things such as the size of office space but pretty quickly we bump into the reality that the biggest expenditure at Platform is the wages.

Back then when we hit a bad patch financially, we all collectively decided to take a pay reduction. It took quite a lot of meetings and discussions to get to that decision, but I felt very happy that our democratic structure could cope with a potentially very difficult situation. I'm a sailor by pleasure, I love sailing and you have to build the skill to sail with the storm, not build your skill to deal with the easiest weather for sailing. I feel happy when Platform has developed enough to deal not just with easy sailing but with a storm. To my mind, our socially just waging system helps us to deal with storms together. In fact, it enforces a sense of collectivity.

Moreover, I don't see how you could be truly democratic if you had a wage differential, I don't understand how that would work in an organisation like ours. I also understand that in theory we live in a democratic society, and there are massive wage differentials, but I would say that the existence of the wage difference between the

AN EXAMPLE OF A SOCIALLY JUST WAGING SYSTEM

1

HOW TO START

Discuss this option within your group/organisation.
Discuss what a socially just waging system could look like in your group and try it out.

2

HOW LONG IT TAKES

Undefined.

3

RESOURCES

According to the commonly established guidelines.
At least one person responsible for setting the wage level for everyone in the group.

4

USEFUL CHOICES

Treat it as a living process, keep on discussing how it works and feels for everyone involved.

CEO of BP and the person who delivers the sandwiches to the head office of BP undermines democracy.

a year needs to come up so we can pay people better to create a more inclusive organisation.

What are the critical points of the socially just waging system?

It is not a perfect system. We could say that actually it is constantly failing and that we are constantly trying to improve it. Just to illustrate that: we recently felt quite proud because we were the top of a survey for the 'most effective organisation on ecological and social justice issues in the U.K. with the lowest budget'. We came out as the most politically effective but we also had the lowest overhead. And we thought it was cool and effective. But then we thought, maybe it's a problem. To some extent our socially just waging system and horizontal structure suppresses wage levels – which can be a good thing because the ecological impact of the organisation might therefore be lower – but in another way it means that as an organisation we create a space of privilege that works only for people who can actually live with the core rate of salary we are proposing.

I recently had a brilliant colleague who worked with us for eight years, who comes from a poor second generation immigrant family with no spare capital in the family at all. She basically had to move on partly in order to earn more and save up money to put down a deposit for a home of her own. That's a problem and we are beginning to understand that the core rate of 35,000€

Further links and references:

- <https://platformlondon.org>