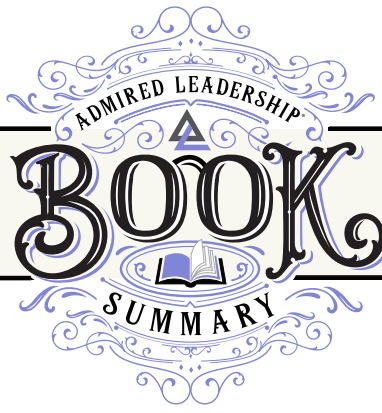




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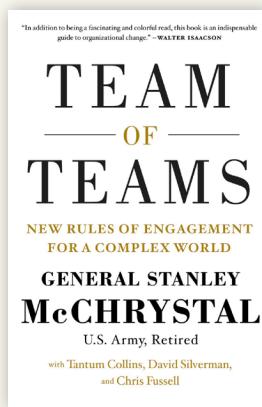
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Team of Teams

New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World

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General Stanley McChrystal became the leader of the Joint Special Operations Task Force charged with defeating Al Qaeda in Iraq in 2004. He quickly realized that to combat the organic and fluid network of Al Qaeda fighters, the US military would have to abandon its traditional hierarchical structure. They would instead need to adopt a new organizational model that would withstand and counter modern-day challenges in a complex world. Sharing the lessons of this experience, his book, **Team of Teams**, walks the reader through how to build an organizational structure in which relationships between specialized teams resemble those between individuals on a single team.

Key Quotes:

“There’s likely a place in paradise for people who tried hard, but what really matters is succeeding. If that requires you to change, that’s your mission” (p. 8).

“Efficiency remains important, but the ability to adapt to complexity and continual change has become an imperative” (p. 5). — GENERAL STANLEY MCCHRYSTAL

Key Points:

Sons of Proteus. Proteus was a shape-shifting god whom the Greeks were only able to defeat by themselves becoming fluid and flexible in battle. To effectively face Al Qaeda in Iraq’s network, the military had to change “the internal architecture and culture” of their force (p. 32).

Clockwork. While the old, tried and true approach of using “known, repeatable processes” in running organizations remains valuable in some scenarios, a new generation of threats requires a different approach (p. 52).

From Complicated to Complex. Our “interdependent and fast-paced world” has become more complex, and old approaches relying on prediction and planning are less effective (p. 74).

Doing the Right Thing. In complex environments, **adaptability and resilience** are better goals than **efficiency** (p. 84).

From Command to Team. A **team** versus **command** approach allows for better adaptability in situations involving tactical complexity. This method makes use of sharing trust and purpose and a “bottom-up” instead of a “top-down” style (p. 114).

Team of Teams. When fighting Al Qaeda in Iraq or confronting other complex threats and challenges, the solution is a “team of teams’ – an organization within which the relationships between constituent teams resembled those between individuals on single teams: teams that had traditionally resided in separate silos would now have to become fused to one another via trust and purpose” (p. 132).

Seeing the System. It requires a “disciplined effort” to make organizations engage in radical levels of information sharing and transparency, and all the members have to be well-informed about the entire system (p. 154).


Brains Out of the Footlocker. Rethink how you can physically and procedurally nurture transparency and information sharing. “Physical spaces and established processes” can throw up “barriers to information sharing.” McChrystal established a virtual operations and intelligence meeting that ran daily rather than weekly and was synchronized to work with schedules across time zones (p. 170).

Beating the Prisoner’s Dilemma. To encourage the collaboration and sharing necessary between teams, you need to build trust. “Embedding and liaison programs create strong lateral ties” and, from that, trust (p. 198).


Hands Off. Train and empower your people to make decisions and execute. Do not unnecessarily slow things down with a need to rubber stamp (pp. 202, 219).

Leading Like a Gardener. Rather than a top-down, controlling approach, leaders are wise to take the approach of leading “as a gardener, enabling rather than directing.” McChrystal describes the leader as a person who “creates and maintains an ecosystem” (p. 232).

Symmetries. Organizations that become more **transparent** and **organic** in their operations increase in speed and precision. Wedding what he calls “shared consciousness” with “empowered execution” yields McChrystal’s organizational goal of adaptability, and these two must exist together for an organization to be effective (p. 251).



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Key Concepts:

OVERVIEW


General McChrystal's task force was charged with taking on Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) in 2004. Taking on AQI forced the military to rethink how they run operations and led to the "team of teams" concept McChrystal describes and promotes. To become a team of teams, McChrystal identified changes that must occur in three areas: organizational structure, culture, and leadership.

In each of these different areas, military operations in Iraq were forced to adapt to the new environment – one that was riddled with uncertainty and unpredictability. Overall, the organizations that embraced the principles which McChrystal calls "shared consciousness" and "empowered execution" would be more equipped with information and agility to overcome enemy operations.

As the war against Al Qaeda and its leaders progressed, General McChrystal's task force became smarter, faster, and more strategic in handling terroristic threats. The organizational structure changed in that the relationships between specialized teams resembled those between individuals on a single team. The organization's culture shifted in a way that reflected a more collaborative versus a competitive approach. Information was more easily accessible and transparent which produced competent individuals that could act and behave with a clear vision of the organization's goals and mission. Lastly, General McChrystal learned to embrace a leadership style that was more enabling and nurturing to ensure the sustainability of these changes that took place within.



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THE PROTEUS PROBLEM

In Greek mythology, Proteus was a shape-shifting god whom Greek soldiers eventually defeated by managing to tenaciously adapt to his threat, no matter his shape. McChrystal encourages organizations to adapt to a complex new world and new threats.

McChrystal's task force initially struggled to overcome terroristic threats because they applied traditional ways of thinking to an ever-changing complex environment. "Since the Industrial Revolution, most industries have subscribed to management doctrines informed by or similar to Frederick Taylor's '**Scientific Management, a system that is excellent for achieving highly efficient execution of known, repeatable processes at scale**' (p. 52).

But the task force had to use a different approach. "AQI's unorthodox structure allowed it to thrive in an operating environment that diverged radically from those we had traditionally faced: the twenty-first century is more connected, faster paced, and less predictable than previous eras" (p. 32).

Complex systems (unlike complicated systems, in which multiple parts are connected in orderly and simplistic ways) are a formation of densely intricate and interdependent links, and present “a broad range of possible outcomes; the **type and sheer number of interactions prevent us from making accurate predictions**” (p. 67).

Resilience thinking offers an alternative to traditional ideas of efficiency and allows leaders to accept that they cannot always predict an outcome. Instead, they can develop a culture in which their organizations can face challenges and maintain strategic integrity. “Prediction is not the only way to confront threats; developing resilience, learning how to reconfigure to confront the unknown, is a much more effective way to respond to a complex environment” (p. 84).

FROM MANY, ONE

In the early 1900s, Frederick Taylor’s theory of “scientific management” heralds a chain of command in which leaders have independent goals and access to information. “As you travel down a traditional org chart, motivation and contextual awareness become more limited and specific, and more remote from the organization’s overall strategic aims” (p. 99).

But in McChrystal’s model, “team members tackling complex environments must all grasp the team’s situation and overarching purpose. Only if each of them understands the goal of a mission and the strategic context in which it fits can team members evaluate risks on the fly and know how to behave in relation to their teammates” (p. 99).

Great teams possess two main components: trust and a common goal. “The connectivity of trust and purpose imbues teams with an ability to solve problems that could never be foreseen by a single manager – their solutions often emerge as the bottom-up result of interactions, rather than from top-down orders” (p. 114).

Individual teams can adapt to a complex environment because they operate on a smaller scale, they can establish trust between members, and they are aware of one another’s strengths and weaknesses. They are also able to remain specialized and act quickly. Increasing the number of individuals on a team would impede its effectiveness.

A command of teams exists when teams act individually and report to a single command. “Although teams have proliferated across many sectors, they have almost always done so in the confines of broader commands” (p. 132).



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SHARED CONSCIOUSNESS

For teams to work organically together, there needs to be radical transparency and a shared understanding.

An organization of teams is successful when members prioritize group success over individual success. “This emphasis on group success spurs cooperation and fosters trust and purpose. But people cooperate only if they can see the interdependent reality of their environment” (p. 153).

To foster trust and collaboration between teams so that they can perform in a complex environment, information must be easily accessible so that there is a shared consciousness throughout the organization. McChrystal's task force “found itself confronted with a complex problem that demanded a systems approach to its solution; because of the interdependence of the operating environment.” In his new system, “organizations would need members to understand the entire, interconnected system” (p. 154).

To achieve a shared consciousness, organizations must also have transparency that provides “every team with an unobstructed, constantly up-to-date view of the rest of the organization” (p. 163).

One of the ways in which General McChrystal's task force became more transparent was through the transformation of daily “Operation and Intelligence” (O&I) meetings. All members of the task force had the opportunity to join in and share information freely within the military community. The benefits of sharing information far outweighed the risk of critical information falling into the wrong hands.

“We used embedding and liaison programs to create strong lateral ties between our units, and with our partner organizations. Where systemic understanding mirrors the sense of ‘purpose’ that bonds small teams, this mirrored the second ingredient to team formation: ‘trust’” (p. 198).

LETTING GO

Shared consciousness lacks effectiveness when coupled with traditional forms of leadership and hierarchical bureaucracies. “A big piece of why we lagged AQI lay in our need to relay decisions up and down the chain of command” (p. 202).



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The risk of waiting to make a decision was more costly than allowing other people to make decisions that would ultimately hold the leader responsible. “I began to reconsider the nature of my role as leader. The wait for my approval was **not** resulting in any better decisions, and our priority should be reaching the best possible decision that could be **made in a time frame that allowed it to be relevant**” (p. 209).

Greater trust and shared consciousness allow more members of an organization to have access to a report and an understanding of the overall goal. Individuals were able to make decisions without the approval of designated leaders. “Effective adaptation to emerging threats and opportunities requires the disciplined practice of empowered execution. Individuals and teams closest to the problem, armed with unprecedented levels of insights from across the network, offer the best ability to decide and act decisively” (p. 219).

“The role of the senior leader was no longer that of controlling puppet master, but rather that of an empathetic crafter of culture” (p. 222).

“The temptation to lead as a **chess master, controlling each move of the organization, must give way to an approach as a gardener**, enabling rather than directing” (p. 232).

“**A gardening approach to leadership is anything but passive.** The leader acts as an ‘**Eyes On, Hands Off**’ enabler who creates and **maintains an ecosystem** in which the organization operates” (p. 232).

LOOKING AHEAD

General McChrystal’s task force was able to secure victories by capturing several of Al Qaeda’s leaders. “We had become not a well-oiled machine, but an adaptable complex organism, constantly twisting, turning, and learning to overwhelm our protean adversary” (p. 243).

“Empowerment without context will lead to havoc.” McChrystal explains that “an organization should empower its people, but only after it has done the heavy lifting of creating shared consciousness” (p. 244).

“Our destination is a future whose form we may not find comforting, but which has just as much beauty and potential as the straight lines and right angles of the past century of reductionism: this future will take the form of organic networks, resilience engineering, controlled flooding – a world without stop signs” (p. 249).

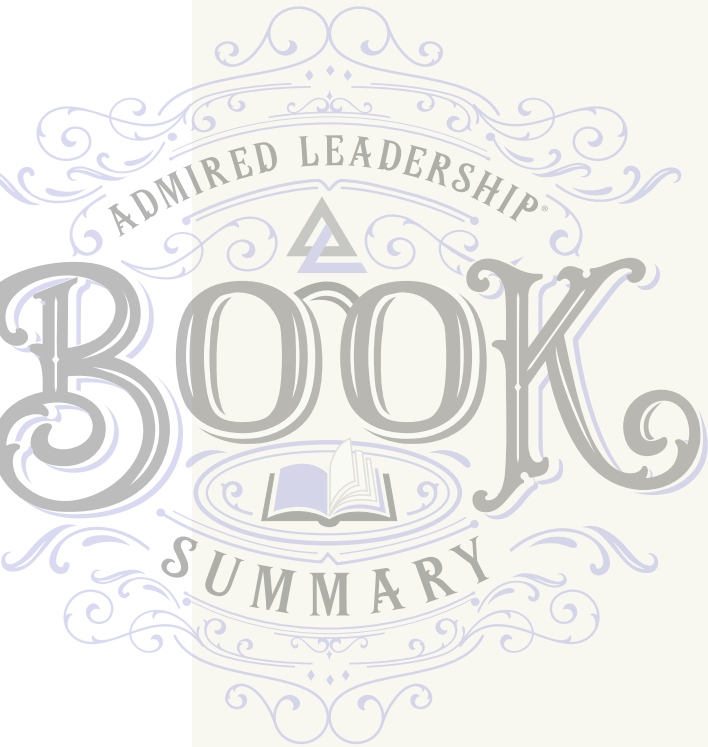


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“At the core of the Task Force’s journey to adaptability lay a yin-and-yang symmetry of **shared consciousness**, achieved through strict, centralized forums of communication and extreme transparency, and **empowered execution**, which involved the decentralization of managerial authority. Together, these powered our Task Force; neither would suffice alone” (p. 251).

McChrystal, Stanley. (2015). **Team of Teams**: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World. New York: Penguin Publishing Group.



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