

**SOUTHWESTERN ASSEMBLIES OF GOD UNIVERSITY**

**Leading High-Impact Teams  
LDR 5263.530**

**Instructor: Dr. Clancy Hayes**

**Textbook Assignment #5: *Team of Teams***

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### *Team of Teams* Reflection

General Stanley McChrystal, in collaboration with Tantum Collins, David Silverman, and Chris Fussell, write *Team of Teams: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World* in an effort to explore their discoveries about team leadership from their time working on the Joint Special Operations Task Force, an elite segment of the United States military, during an integral time in the war on Iraq. Despite their supremacy in the wars past, times and resources had changed so much so that they bitterly struggled in their efforts to contain the threat posed by the Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). Their goal is to uncover the factors of leading organizations to success to today's world and refute the pursuit of organizational efficiency alone. The authors note that, "Efficiency remains important, but the ability to adapt to complexity and continual change has become an imperative" (McChrystal, Collins, Silverman & Fussell, 2015, p. 5). This very comment reveals the primary premise in which the authors elaborate on and defend. Organizations are no longer simply complicated but complex, and they must be ran with new leadership structures in mind.

### **Structural Deficiencies**

The authors unveil some of the realities that delayed much of the Task Force's activity on the battlefield in the early 2000's. One of these being the evidence that their highly qualified, well-oiled, timeless structure was being outsmarted and outran by an unorthodox dispersed network of amateurs. Technological advances and social media presence have changed the immediacy of information access. In the twenty-first century, organizations are more connected, faster paced, and less predictable than ever before. Not only does this affect military efforts, but it deeply affects all types of organizations in today's society. McChrystal and his team discovered that their organizational structure—military standardization, industrialized efficiency,

disciplined reductionism, and detailed strategizing—was not going to win the fight against the AQI. They had to change their culture and management style.

This very shift in organizational design proved to be foundational to their team being successful. They had to discover the new delineation of organizational structure. In the past, like an intentional machine, they could anticipate their outcome dependent on the input they entered in the situation. However, as revealed by the authors, this ability to breakdown an organizational structure and command, no matter how large and seemingly complicated, was simply that—complicated. The reality of the twenty-first century is that organizations and outcomes have become delineative organisms and beyond prediction. Organizations can no longer be viewed as complicated systems to a predictable end but complex ecosystems in which interdependencies breed unpredictability. McChrystal, Collins, Silverman, and Fussell (2015) note that, “Complexity, on the other hand, occurs when the number of interactions between components increases dramatically” (p.57).

The realizations of the complexity of modern organizations has redefined the ultimate goal or measure of organizational success. The authors reveal that efficiency can no longer but the sole or even overarching goal of an organization. Rather, organizations must pursue adaptability and shift their managerial mindset. To avoid a structural deficiency, organizations must develop a culture of flexibility and resilience, thus breeding adaptability. The mentality modifications that allow for this change to become a reality would not be an easy feat for the Task Force and those that they interact with on a daily basis, nor will it be an easy accomplishment for any other organization. However, as revealed in *Team of Teams*, an adaptable complex organization is one that is ran much more like the network they were competing against with the AQI.

### **Building the Team**

Cooperative adaptability remains key to successful teams. Continuing to compare the military's structure to that necessary to develop in order to be victorious against the AQI, the authors analyze the cooperative adaptability of the SEALs versus their organizational structure at large. The SEALs and other mentioned cooperative teams are bonded by a strong interdependent, horizontal trust. Trust and relationship between the leader and their direct reports is no longer the only essential element to team building. In fact, the authors argue this reveals a command style leadership, which is no longer effective in today's society. Connectivity must be occurring across all levels of the organization. Given a common purpose and a deeply developed trust among team members performance will increase. The authors observe that, "team members cannot simply depend on orders; teamwork is a process of reevaluation, negotiation, and adjustment: players are constantly sending messages to, and taking cues from, their teammates, and those players *must* be able to read one another's every move and intent" (McChrystal, Collins, Silverman & Fussell, 2015, p. 98). Foundational to developing an adaptable organization that can operate in complex environments and work through complex situations is the integration of trust and purpose. A common purpose affirmed by trust among team members will unlock other necessary elements of creating a successful team.

It was this fusion of trust and purpose that allowed the development of a "team of teams" within the Task Force. They discovered the necessity of developing "an organization within which the relationship between constituent teams resembled those between individuals on a single team" (McChrystal, Collins, Silverman & Fussell, 2015, p. 132). This was the structural and relational change that was necessary for performing as needed on the twenty-first century

battlefield. However, the authors observe this necessity for any organization in order to produce the adaptability to truly see performance goals met.

A team of teams only operates effectively when contextual understanding is present. There are too many potential unknowns and interdependent factors at work in any given situation for a proper, intentional, disciplined, and sometimes risky sharing of information to not be present. The authors reveal the culture shock and change this took within a broad military organization known for its closed doors, secrecy, and sensitive information. However, as observed by the authors this sharing of information culture change is a difficult but necessary journey to develop shared consciousness on any given team. Strong lateral connection and contextual or systematic understanding allows for a shared consciousness which improves any kind of organization's effectiveness through an increase in collective intelligence and ideas (McChrystal, Collins, Silverman & Fussell, 2015). However, to fully see the benefits of organizations releasing a reductionistic control for a shared-purpose-driven team of teams, leaders must embrace empowerment at potentially uncomfortable levels.

### **Empowering the Team**

Empowerment remains a leadership buzzword that, in summary, represents the “decentralization of decision-making authority” (McChrystal, Collins, Silverman & Fussell, 2015, p. 211). McChrystal and his team at the Task Force began to realize that there was still time delay and potential error due to lack of immediate knowledge in the consistent need to channel decisions upward to himself or others of higher rank. He recognized the imperative to increasing efficiency was to allow for a sharing of power, especially in regard to making decisions. Their term for this leadership essential is “empowered execution” (McChrystal, Collins, Silverman & Fussell, 2015, p. 214). They recognized that, not only did the speed of

outcomes increase, but the quality of the decisions being made went up with this dispersal of authority. The authors note that, “An individual who makes a decision becomes more invested in its outcome” (McChrystal, Collins, Silverman & Fussell, 2015, p. 215). Thus, with an established shared consciousness, successful empowered execution is possible. It remains imperative for twenty-first century organizations to increase their speed and ability through empowerment in order to compensate for the increase of interdependence.

Finally, to make this organizational transition, leaders must change their mentality from a heroic, commanding leader to a humble gardener (McChrystal, Collins, Silverman & Fussell, 2015). McChrystal reveals that the behavior of a leader becomes the ultimate shifter of culture. He used genuine listening skills and knew how to balance being a public fan and private critic in order to not demoralize anyone. He acknowledges that a gardener’s primary job is to tend, which requires visibility and visiting that which is being harvested. This allows a leader to communicate guidance, have situational understanding, and inspire through the reinforcement of the purpose. Leaders must resolve to be real and transparent to effectively establish the culture in which their organization should be operating in. Gardeners are enablers that create, lead, and maintain a culture that sustain flexible durability.

### **Application**

The public school systems remain structured and ran as complicated systems in a complex organizational world. Ultimately, I believe this is part of the reason the system is struggling to reach certain students and parents with the ease they once did. Although we have implemented twenty-first century skills curriculum and allow technologies, it is not enough. For example, one of my students jumped off a walking bridge this past school year (she just broke a leg), but due to the speed of the technology and social media the students have, the brother of the

student was informed by peers of his sisters jump long before any school personnel was sent to retrieve him from class. This is a major situation but minor example to this reality. Nonetheless, it reveals a necessity of delineating the timeless school structures that have always been in place. Unfortunately, reforming the culture of the public school system and even DeSoto Independent School District is far beyond my control or scope of influence. However, *Team of Teams* revealed intriguing truths to the situations in which we reside in the twenty-first century. As a math teacher with an understanding of the difference between complicated systems and complex mathematical systems, I relate to their language and recognize the reality in today's society.

For my particular team, we reside within a team of teams at large but much of this structure is still ran through reductionist principles. For the high school alone, there are endless numbers of teams ultimately reporting back to either a team lead, a department head, an assistant principal, the associate principal, and finally the principal. My algebra I team lies in the math department team which is a team within the high school as an organization. Being in leadership at the bottom of the lineated reductionist system makes implementing some of these organizational truths rather difficult. However, as for my team, I choose to create a team that functions as an organism not a machine.

Even without knowing my entire team yet, there is a strong possibility that I will be leading with the least experience in the field. Therefore, it would be naive of me to assume a heroic or commanding leaders' stance anyway. We must begin by first establishing our common purpose and cultivating a trust that can lead to cooperative adaptability. During our team time prior to school starting, we will be creating a mission statement and doing exercises to take these relationships beyond surface level this year. In order for our team to be willing to share ideas and benefit from communal knowledge, we must have the shared consciousness that comes first from

an established trust. Then, to reinforce this shared consciousness, I am going to try to establish a culture of sharing information. Last year, the majority of the team held back and made their classroom their only concern because they felt they were never kept in the loop. While some information may not be allowed to share, I will quickly and affirmatively release all that I can to help to avoid this happening again this year.

Finally, empowered execution will increase our efficiency as an algebra I team significantly. If team members will take on a project, own it, make decisions, and bring it back to the team completed, we can maximize our resources available for our classrooms and students. Also, we can create new avenues of mathematical support for the students by maximizing on the actions and decisions of each team member—targeted tutoring, creative applications, etc. Also, each teacher will ultimately be given the decision-making authority for their classrooms. This increases morale for teachers because they do not feel they are stuck in a box that they did not create.

### **Conclusion**

McChrystal, Collins, Silverman, and Fussell, in *Team of Teams*, effectively communicated the need to shift an organizational mindset from a pursuit of efficiency to that of adaptability in the face of complex situations. A leader's job is no longer to simply command and deploy, rather leaders must foster, build, and enable a culture that allows for twenty-first century flexibility and resilience throughout the organization. Organizations must begin to pull away from their reductionist theory habits in order to reform to the interdependent connectivity of today's society. If they do not heed to the imperatives presented by the authors, as times continue to change, their effectiveness will likely diminish.



Resources

McChrystal, S., Collins, T., Silverman, D., & Fussell, C. (2015). *Team of teams: New rules of engagement for a complex world*. New York, NY: Portfolio/Penguin.