

Teams: A Manifesto

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Society is facing a new and unprecedented challenge—responding to its own overwhelming complexity [1, 2]. The structure of our society must change.

Around the world people are rising in revolutionary movements against their governments. In outrage at dysfunction and self-serving corruption, they are seeking to make a new world, one in which individual opportunity and fulfillment are consistent with collective actions.

In many places violence is destabilizing state power and social order. In others, mass dissatisfaction and disaffection are driving unprecedented social movements. The unrest in rich and poor societies originates in deep and pervasive frustration, whether due to lack of essentials like food, or of stymied economic or other aspirations.

All forms of governance are failing their citizens—dictatorships and communism failed in the last part of the 20th century, and in this century democracies are not meeting citizen expectations. No matter which leaders are chosen, the systems themselves are failing.

The ideological battles of the past century cannot capture what is happening today. In those battles the competition was between individual and state rights, and between dictatorship, communism, socialism, and democracy—various ways of balancing the invisible system of economic self-regulation with the intentional decision making of policy makers. A new concept is needed that transcends those frameworks.

Why should governments fail? Because leaders, whether self-appointed dictators, or elected officials, are unable to identify what policies will be good for a complex society. The unintended consequences are beyond their comprehension. Regardless of values or objectives, the outcomes are far from what they intend.

There is a solution. It is not a form of government, no “ism” or “ocracy” will do. It begins with widespread individual action that transforms society—a metamorphosis of social organization in which leadership no longer serves the role it has over millennia. A different type of existence will emerge, affecting all of us as individuals and enabling us to live in a complex world.

To be successful in high complexity challenges requires teamwork. Each team member performs one part of what needs to be done, contributing to the complexity and

scale of what the team does while limiting the complexity each individual faces.

Teamwork is more capable than economic coordination or central decision making.

The increasing complexity of society means professional and personal endeavors will be done in teams. Teams will range from a few individuals to many, in one place or spanning the globe. They will differentiate roles—sharing responsibility for decisions and actions.

Psychology will change. While heroic fiction describes individual striving, we need to learn that being a member of a team is heroic. As in sports, teams form collective identities.

We need to stop looking for leaders and start looking for teammates.

We need to find others we can trust about ideas, advice, and joint action. We need to shift the ego’s focus on autonomy, to pride in collectivity. We need to share the uncertainty we have as individuals in order to gain collective confidence and success.

Society has to coalesce into local and global teams. Teams of individuals, teams of teams, and teams of teams of teams, up to society as a whole. Whether implicitly or explicitly, everybody needs to ask: Do you want to be a member of my team? Can I be a member of your team? Can we say “we” about ourselves to become a collective, with a collective identity?

We are all part of the same team at the largest scale, but who and how we interact with at each scale is important. There is not just one way to do this but there are much better and worse ways to do this. The form that teams will take will vary from place to place. We will discover them as we go. The search for partners and coalescence into teams is an essential dynamic of society today.

This is the next stage of social evolution and there is much we need to learn and do to achieve it: How do we set up processes to create teams? What is the way teams work together well? How do you identify who should be on your team?

Teams at work, and teams in life—a human mandala. Join, become part of the team. From now on, it is about we and not about me or you. We are one.

[1] Y. Bar-Yam, Complexity rising: From Human Beings to Human Civilization, a Complexity Profile, Encyclopedia of Life Support Systems (EOLSS UNESCO Publishers, Oxford, UK, 2002); also NECSI Report 1997-12-01 (1997) <http://www.necsi.edu/projects/yaneer/>

Civilization.html
[2] Y. Bar-Yam, Dynamics of Complex Systems, Westview Press (1997) <http://necsi.edu/publications/dcs/>