

THE STARFISH AND THE SPIDER SUMMARY

By Mike Steele

Read this first! You are reading a compilation of excerpts that have been taken from the Starfish book and arranged in “talking point” order. I do not believe this book has “all” the answers. My goal was to let the ideas in the book prompt thinking, conversation and prayer toward a future together. I added and clarified where the sentence was not clear in this setting. This book assists us by taking a different perspective on things in order to spark some new ideas. As we begin to consider what it might look like for the church to evolve in the future, hopefully these thoughts will prompt questions and discussion. Buy the book to get the whole picture.

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What does a Starfish organism look like?

Is there a person in charge?

A coercive system depends on order and hierarchy. An open system empowers people as peers to function toward their common interests.

Are there headquarters?

A starfish organism doesn't depend on a permanent location or a central headquarters. It is all built around people as the main asset.

If you thump it on the head, will it die?

Since leadership is not based on hierarchy and top down control a starfish doesn't have a head! Therefore, it is difficult to attack. Kill the "leader" and it just branches out further.

Is there a clear division of roles?

Starfish organisms empower people. Anyone can do anything. Healthy "starfish" distribute and function based on gifting and capacity.

If you take out a unit, is the organization harmed?

Since the goal is a decentralized, distributed process, everyone functions in an autonomous fashion based on a common ideology. Therefore, **knowledge and power concentrated or distributed**. It is spread throughout the groups.

Is the organization flexible or rigid?

The best way to describe the organizational aspect is Fluid.

Can you count the employees or participants?

Measures of success revolve around people and tasks. This sometimes makes measuring success an impossible task.

Main traits of a starfish organization:

The starfish doesn't have a head

A starfish is a neural network—basically a network of cells

An open system doesn't have central intelligence; the intelligence is spread throughout the system.

Circles

Catalysts form circles...It's then up to each person to contribute to the best of their ability.

Circles don't have hierarchy and structure.

Instead of rules, they depend on norms

The norms become the backbone of the circle

As the norms of a circle develop, and as members spend more time together, something fascinating happens: they begin to trust one another

It's all based on trust. Built on trust and friendship. Working side by side, people began to trust each other.

Members assume the best of each other, and generally that's what they get in return.

Without circles, there isn't the infrastructure for people to get involved and take ownership of an idea.

Small groups and intimacy - More than fourteen or so members, the bond breaks down. Members become more anonymous.

Being in the physical presence of other participants adds a dimension of closeness, and a sense of ownership emerges. When you see people face to face, it's harder to brush them off.

Ideology

Ideology is the glue that holds decentralized organizations together

They held to their ideology so strongly that they were willing to fight and sacrifice themselves for their cause.

They lived together, conducted business with one another, and shared a common belief system

Everyone's equal

Almost every decentralized organization that has made it big was launched from a preexisting platform.

The Values Are the Organization

Ideology is the fuel that drives the decentralized organization. Seemed at the time to be a radical ideology

The counterintuitive nature of an open system.

Apache example (software)

Apache didn't have a strategic plan on how to move forward. It was a lot more organic—

Volunteers spread across the world

You respect their skills and you like the results you get, not because the boss told you to.

Put people into an open system and they'll automatically want to contribute

Nothing costs money. A gift economy

Open systems can't rely on a policy force

You have added responsibility:

Everyone becomes a guardian of sorts

Responsible for your own welfare and that of those around you.

In open systems, the concept of "neighbor" takes on more meaning than just the person next door.

You may lose connections with those who are currently funding you. Here are a few quotes from the book about how things changed for some of the catalysts and champions.

Didn't have access to the powerful elite anymore.

His cause went against public sentiment, his message went against the establishment.

It flies in the face of big business interests denominations and mega churches will not appreciate that you are pushing against their system and their measures of success.

Often mocked for their peculiarities Often the answer is to mock and ridicule. Reggie McNeal says our only critics come from the inside. "when is the last time you heard an American Christian say, I just hate being persecuted by those pagans!"

Everyone is an equal

The Values Are the Organization

Ideas and Questions to consider concerning a starfish organization.

Decentralized systems are a little trickier to understand. We need an entirely different set of tools in order to understand them.

We will need to address is the fact that our current paradigms of thinking will not support this shift in thinking and processing. Centralized organizations function and exist for different reasons than decentralized organizations.

In a decentralized organization, there's no clear leader, no hierarchy, and no headquarters. If and when a leader does emerge, that person has little power over others.

What is the main focus of our organization?

What is the main focus of our field teams?

*In what ways do the two appear to be the same? In what ways are the two kinds of groups different?
Do we believe that an organization can exist without top down leadership?
Can a team of peers/equals really function together and move forward?
What methodology/practice would have to be implemented for this kind of a facilitating leadership team to not just exist but flourish?
How will you measure success?*

The power lay with each individual (Mimics the concept of the priesthood of all believers)

*Will we entrust the future of the vision and its implementation to the field?
Will corporate be able to see itself as a total support system rather than oversight?
What about current leadership structures?
How does a team function without a central system?
How are things initiated?
Is this practical in a local/global team?*

In response to over centralized industries or institutions, people rebel. This quote was in regard to hierarchies and top down leadership function. This seems to be the case in North America with over 20 million people leaving the traditional churches and institutions in the last five years.

*What are they rebelling against?
What are the reasons for this mass exodus?
What does it say about the work of the Spirit in North America?
What does it say about those systems and structures?
What should be our response?*

The phrase “you should” doesn’t even exist in the Apache language. Coercion is a foreign concept.

In part, our experience with western Christendom has been built on a system of duty and guilt. Now we are talking about self motivation, personal responsibility, and transparency with your team and vulnerability to share your weaknesses and not be exposed and destroyed in the process.

*Does each of us have the calling to function proactively without a central control demanding things of us?
Will we create a process of responsibility and accountability with those on our regional teams to see them become leaders also?*

Intuitive nature of the organization

*Do you think intuitively?
Does emotional intelligence “fit” in North America? See Stephen Covey’s 8th Habit
How do we incorporate emotional intelligence into our thinking?*

We just knew it was fundamental—a way of connecting communities that was very different. There needs to be a sense from all that this is a necessary change in this season. Those on this journey recognize that there is a price to be paid and that they will be misunderstood.

Do we want to see our organization or church become a relational starfish organism?

*What does this mean for our leadership structure?
What does it mean for our work?
What responsibilities move to the people?*

*What is the supporting role of the leadership?
Do we understand the cost of moving in this direction?*

The ways people respond to each other in a starfish organization.

People communicate directly between members and can withdraw any time.

What makes them stay? They are committed to relationships and ideology.

They listen to people and seek to meet felt needs. They figure out what people were asking for and respond appropriately.

It's community and it develops and functions in a culture of trust.

To accomplish a task, one of the arms must convince the other arms that it's a good idea to do so.

These open systems are about the users, not about the leadership or corporate profits. There is no central command keeping tabs.

It's easy to rebel against a boss. It's much harder to dismiss your peers.

Often a boss is dismissed as a tyrant or control freak. Sometimes it is true! In this new environment, peer level communication and decision making is essential and non negotiable. Trusting each other enough to yield when necessary and knowing when to press a point is vital.

How do we develop a climate of trust that will allow us to function at this level?

Questions to consider in becoming a starfish organization:

How does a starfish function to create an environment of responsibility and accountability?

What is accountability?

How do you develop it? Keep it?

What makes a person accountable?

What could be our measures of success?

Changes in the measure of success:

The question is asked, "How many do we have?" Answer, "There is no way to tell."

Are we OK with that?

To this point, our measure of success has largely been based on the number of churches planted. We will need to find new ways to express our "successes" in order to be understood and be able to communicate with each other and our constituents/donor base.

*In what ways can we restructure our language regarding our measures of accomplishment and success?
What is the difference between measuring “people results” and “task” results?*

Consequences of changing your measure of success. The issue of MONEY!

This will require us to realize that those we are reaching typically will have a different language and understanding than those who contribute to the church.

A sad fact is that when there is nothing to fight for, no positions or possessions, many people will not participate.

Establishing ownership is important to seeing the movement funded. The Bible says that where your money is where your heart is. There will be a massive shift in the understanding of giving and ownership.

What views of money will change?

How can patterns of giving be changed?

What do we need money for? Do we need to change the expectations of how money is distributed?

Will this require us changing patterns of ministry and support for leaders?

Either be somewhat centralized and get paid, or be completely decentralized but produce no revenues. Overall profits decrease.

Ironically, the system works because it's underfunded and because almost everyone is a volunteer. This is counterintuitive to a capitalist modeled society. It is also why many have not yet understood their role in giving. They are still thinking someone else is in charge. Someone else will take care of it!

In this new paradigm, we all hold the responsibility and capacity to move the process forward. The movement is not the property of an organization, it is the passion and calling of a people set apart for kingdom works.

Are working groups funded by the organization, or are they self-funding?

How does this impact the way we develop teams around the world?

Funding from the corporation equals ownership and control. This is counter productive to a starfish organism. In a starfish organization there is no central well of money. This flies in the face of our society and business model.

Do you believe these statements?

How do you care for and nurture those who are “out there” all the time?”

Is there any difference if we live in community and carry each other's needs as our own?

Are there some models of this thinking in western culture?

Can Americans make the shift?

What about independence and autonomy?

The moment you introduce property rights into the equation, everything changes: the starfish organization turns into a spider.

Possession creates envy, jealousy, coveting and the like.

If coveted paid positions were introduced, turf battles and a hierarchical system might result

*How do we function without paid positions? Is this possible within our 501c3 structures?
How do we dispel the perception of rebellion? They can fire us!*

The power shifted from symbolic to material.

He who has the gold makes the rules. Once there was something to possess, people created hierarchies to control. They gained authoritative power. They used their positions to hold power and hold onto possessions. There was a concentration of power. Now a few instruct the many. Growth is stunted and people fall in line in order to get their share.

Advantages of starfish toward the completion of the Great Commission.

Open systems can easily mutate. They grow incredibly quickly.

In his last years, Jim Montgomery was fond of speaking about exponential growth. Research shows that this model fully releases people into the possibility for exponential growth. Here is an example of exponential growth.

From late 2004, Skype had 15 million users. By the end of 2005, it had 57 million. When Skype shifted to an open system they grew fourfold in one year! This is exponential growth.

How can you shift to an open system?

Does this speak to how we actually see exponential growth in the Kingdom?

Does it require us to revisit where we spend the majority of our efforts to see “a vibrant family of Jesus within easy access of every person on earth”?

THE CATALYST

Fast talker and an even faster thinker. Charismatic. Friends with some of the country's leading activists ...it's all about making connections

We were dealing with an entirely different creature from the CEO. Cast from a mold that is vastly different from that of a traditional executive. Their leadership style resembles iron. Iron is a catalyst that initiates a reaction without fusing into that reaction. A catalyst transfers ownership and responsibility to the circle.

A catalyst is an inspirational figure who spurs others to action. Pathologically optimistic person. Talks a lot about love and respect. Core values are to be thoughtful and kind and to have no personal attacks. Works to maintain health of the movement

Spends time communicating , time writing e-mails to the community. Always touching base - people oriented. Always discussing issues. Engage people on policy matters and try to settle disputes.

Offers an incredible level of freedom. Does not micro manage. No controls, no schedules, no direction. Hands-Off Approach. No way to measure results. No way to keep track of all the members. A catalyst gets a decentralized organization going and then cedes control to the members.

It works because a catalyst empowers people. Trust is placed in people to act and function appropriately. Gets out of the way and lets people do their best. This creates a platform for creativity and innovation. Starfish organizations need ambiguity to survive. A catalyst's most important relationships are based on trust and understanding. They know that values are a stronger binding force than authority. Trust - All you can control is whether people have personal relationships with each other based on trust.

Imagine having so much faith and trust in a community that you'd continue talking to them, let alone respecting them, after they'd burned your effigy. Genuinely interested in helping people. They desire to help. Wanting to help is the fuel that drives a catalyst's ability to connect people.

A good catalyst has launched a variety of networks. They are able to navigate complex social networks. They map relationships in a way that is nearly impossible for most people. A Catalyst realizes how important it is to understand what people truly want. Thrive on meeting new people every day

Strong and ongoing ideology to keep them going. They lead by example.

You don't follow a catalyst because you have to—you follow a catalyst because he understands you. Role of constant cheerleader. Inspiration - A true catalyst isn't just a matchmaker but also an inspiration to others to work toward a goal that often doesn't involve personal gain.

Emotional Intelligence - All the catalysts we've met are intellectually brilliant, but they tend to lead with emotions. To a catalyst, emotional connections come first. Once there's an emotional connection, then and only then is it time to brainstorm and talk strategy. Counterintuitive element in their thinking.

One of the most common answers we got when we talked to catalysts was "I don't know." They have a high tolerance for ambiguity. A decentralized organization is so fluid that someone who needs order and structure would quickly go mad.

Believes strongly in giving youth a voice.

The Champion

The champion is relentless is promoting a new idea

There's nothing subtle about the champion.

They are inherently hyperactive

He dedicated his life to the movement

He participated in public debates, published newsletters

He met with opinion-makers

They are respected

They never bothered securing recognition for themselves

They are always ready to speak on the subject

They are passionate

Are you a catalyst or champion?

Here are some quotes to spark your evaluation of the difference between a catalyst and a champion.

Stanton, the quintessential catalyst, kept pursuing new ways to expand women's rights,... Anthony, being the quintessential champion, stayed the course, relentlessly pursuing women's suffrage

She'd refuse to talk to organizations about concrete strategy and nuts and bolts.

She'd tell them, "I'm not going to talk about programs or budgets..."

Instead, what brings joy—tears of joy in your eyes

I want to understand you as a person

Champions remain and see it through. Catalysts leave or move on to extend the work.

Champions get identified with the work, Catalysts are not known.

Comparisons of CEO model leadership

Catalysts and CEOs draw upon very different tools

CEOs lead by command-and-control.

Catalysts, on the other hand, depend on trust.

CEOs must be rational.

Catalysts depend on emotional intelligence; their job is to create personal relationships

CEOs are directive

Catalysts are inspirational and collaborative; they talk about ideology and urge people to work together to make the ideology a reality

CEOs create order and structure; catalysts thrive on ambiguity and apparent chaos.

A CEO's job is to maximize profit.

A catalyst is usually mission-oriented. People oriented

Catalysts are bound to rock the boat. They are much better at being agents of change than guardians of tradition.

Catalysts do well in situations that call for radical change and creative thinking.

They bring innovation, they're also likely to create a certain amount of chaos and ambiguity

Put them into a structured environment, and they might suffocate.

But let them dream and they'll thrive.

Initiating a change in leadership models.

Conversations were difficult at first as change is not easy

It was a little bit scary for everybody

It required vulnerability as a leader.”

Dealing with passionate activist groups is chaotic but worth it.

Hybrid organizations

A network based on trust

A belief that people are basically good

A proven track record

Trust begets trust.

If you love someone, set them free. His real genius was in decentralizing the massive organization.

Each unit maintained its own profit-and-loss statement.

Each unit accountable to itself.

Did away with inefficiencies.

Asked questions, “appreciative inquiry.” Based on people asking each other meaningful questions

People begin to see each other as individuals instead of as a boss or a subordinate.

Appreciative inquiry draws upon knowledge from the edge of the network.

Because everyone feels they have been heard, participants become more likely to support a new plan.

Always did so with gentleness and kindness.

Each team member was considered an important contributor and given a high level of autonomy.

Their opinions mattered.

Flattened its management hierarchy

Now everyone was in it together

Accepted position that the end of business is not “to make money.””

“I feel that the team members are what are most important. We can function without management.”

Do you believe a hybrid is possible?

Do you believe it will limit the potential of the movement?

What stands in the way of an effective hybrid?

How are those roadblocks overcome?

What does it all mean for you?

Some thoughts to consider in moving toward a starfish or hybrid based on thoughts from the book.

Decentralize yourself- if you can't beat them, join them.

The best opponent for a starfish organization is often another starfish.

...In decentralized revolution, old strategies don't work.

...The Soviet government failed not only to recognize a new technology but also to see that the world was rapidly changing.

...We're used to having things operate in a certain way. We learn the rules and don't anticipate radical change.

Change has been so rapid that industries and governments have found themselves employing outdated strategies. There are new rules to the game.

This is a lean approach

This large decentralized network of users wreaked havoc on the competition. As counterintuitive as it sounds, it can be better to be small.

Starfish organizations create communities

There is a power in Chaos. In a decentralized structure, the groups become wonderful incubators for creative, destructive, innovative, or crazy ideas and good ideas will attract more people.

This "Knowledge at the Edge" spreads knowledge throughout the organization. Everyone Wants to contribute if allowed. It's all in the spirit of sharing and contributing.

Here is a common human trait: when we're used to seeing something in a certain way, it's hard to imagine it being any other way. This requires massive change.

Some questions to consider in moving to a decentralized starfish.

Are you ready for this?

Is everyone on board?

Do you want to do this?

How's the circle's health? (The leadership team)

How do members continue participating?

How does the network grow?

Is it spreading?

Is it mutating?

This paper is not exhaustive. It is a launching point. Here are a few other books to consider reading on communication and change.

World Café – Juanita Brown

Fierce Conversations – Susan Scott

The Tipping Point – Malcolm Gladwell

The 8th Habit – Stephen Covey