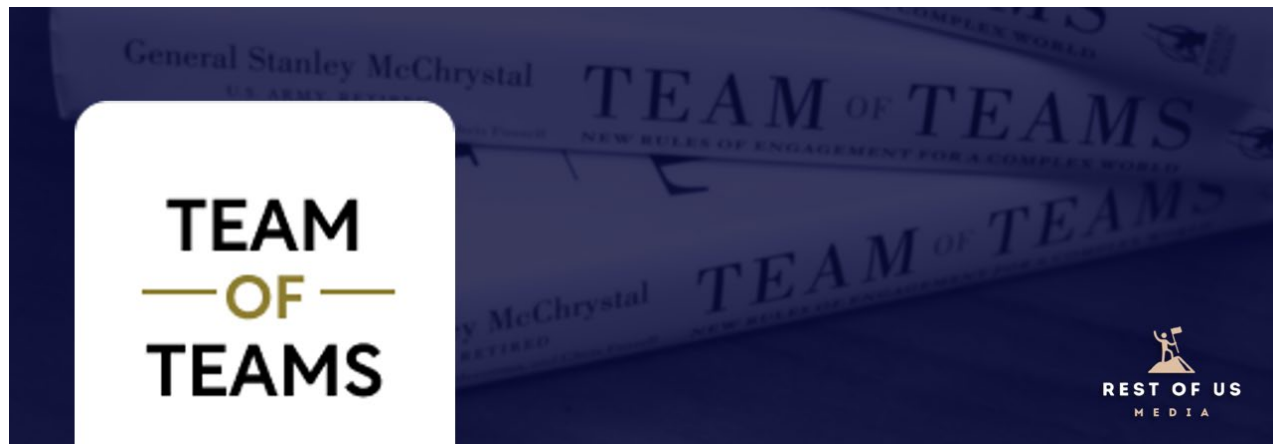




Team of Teams: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World (2015) delivers a foundational text for organizational adaptation. Drawing from transformation of the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) during the Iraq War, GEN Stanley McChrystal (Ret), Tatum Collins, David Silverman, and Chris Fussell argue that the Taylorism of the individual age – focused on silos and specialized efficiency – is fundamentally ill-equipped for the volatile, interconnected challenges of the 21st century.

Key Takeaways

- **Complicated vs. Complex:** Complicated systems are linear and predictable; complex systems are non-linear and volatile, requiring adaptability over rigid planning.
- **Shared Consciousness:** Breaking down silos to ensure every member of the organization understands the big picture in real-time.
- **Empowered Execution:** Pushing decision-making authority down to the lowest possible level – the people closest to the problem.
- **Gardener Mindset:** Shifting the leader's role from a micromanager to an architect shaping the environment.

The core premise of *Team of Teams* is the distinction between complicated and complex systems. McChrystal and team explain that while a complicated machine, like a watch, has many parts, they interact in a predictable, repeatable fashion. In contrast, a complex environment is characterized by organic interactions where small changes can lead to disproportionately large, and unpredictable outcomes.

For the leader in the middle, this distinction is critical. Most middle-management or structured volunteer / non-profit roles are designed to optimize complicated processes. However, when the environment shifts to complex, these rigid processes become liabilities. Leading from the middle requires recognizing that “prediction is not only difficult: it is often impossible” (McChrystal, 2015) when referring to organizations functioning within

complex environments. Therefore, the goal shifts from perfect planning to maximum resilience.

One of McChrystal's most vital concepts for mid-level influencers is shared consciousness. In traditional hierarchies, information is often hoarded or siloed as a metric of informational power. McChrystal argues that for a Team of Teams to function, information must flow horizontally and transparently.

When leading from the middle, you often serve as the connective tissue between disparate groups. By fostering a culture of extreme transparency, you enable your team to see the mission's big picture. As the authors note, "the team must be able to see the system" (Fussell, 2015) to act effectively within it. This transparency builds the trust necessary to move at speed.

If shared consciousness provides the context, *empowered execution* provides the capability. McChrystal described this as "decentralized authority." For a leader in the middle, the greatest temptation is to act as a Chess Master, attempting to control every tactical move.

However, in a fast-moving environment, the leader who insists on approving every decision becomes a bottleneck. Empowered execution requires a disciplined 'eyes on – hands off' philosophy. This means providing your team with clear intent and the information they need, then trusting them to execute without seeking permission at every turn. It is the shift from a command structure to a support structure.

Perhaps the most enduring metaphor in the book is the shift from the chess master to the gardener. While the chess master attempts to dictate the position of every piece, the gardener recognizes that they do not actually grow the variables. Instead the gardener shapes the ecosystems so the variables can thrive.

For those leading without formal authority, this gardener mindset is a source of immense influence. Your value is found in the following construct.

1. Cultivating the Environment: Ensuring the team has the resources and the psychological safety to innovate.
2. Removing Obstacles: Identifying and "weeding out" the bureaucratic friction that slows the team down.
3. Nurturing Connections: Building the horizontal relationships that allow for a seamless Team of Teams architecture.

Applying the principles of *Team of Teams* from the middle of an organization requires a shift from managing tasks to managing the environment. You can cultivate your network through the following actions as your organizational way forward.

1. Establish a daily rhythm: Mirroring the JSOC Operations & Intelligence (O&I) briefing, create a brief, high-transparency forum where your team shares information across project lines of effort. The goal is not a status update, but the creation of a shared consciousness.
2. Audit Your Bottleneck: Identify one decision you currently make that could be handled by a team member. Define the “Commanders Intent” for that task and delegate the authority for the team to execute it.
3. Build Horizontal Bridges: Act as a liaison officer for your team. Proactively reach out to adjacent and enabling departments to share purposeful information. This breaks the silo mentality from the ground up.
4. Adopt the Service Query: In every interaction, ask: “What can I do to make this process more efficient?” This reinforces your role as the gardener who enables growth rather than the chess master who restricts freedom of movement.

By embracing these principles, you stop being a gatekeeper in a hierarchy and start being the architect of a resilient, adaptable network. You move from being a manager to becoming the essential connective tissue of a high-performing organization.

“The Teams of Teams approach doesn’t work because it’s a military framework. It works because it’s a human one.” – Keith Pellegrini, McChrystal Group.

Respectfully submitted,

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You can reach Chris or join the discussion at RestofUsMedia.com.