# Self-Organizing Team

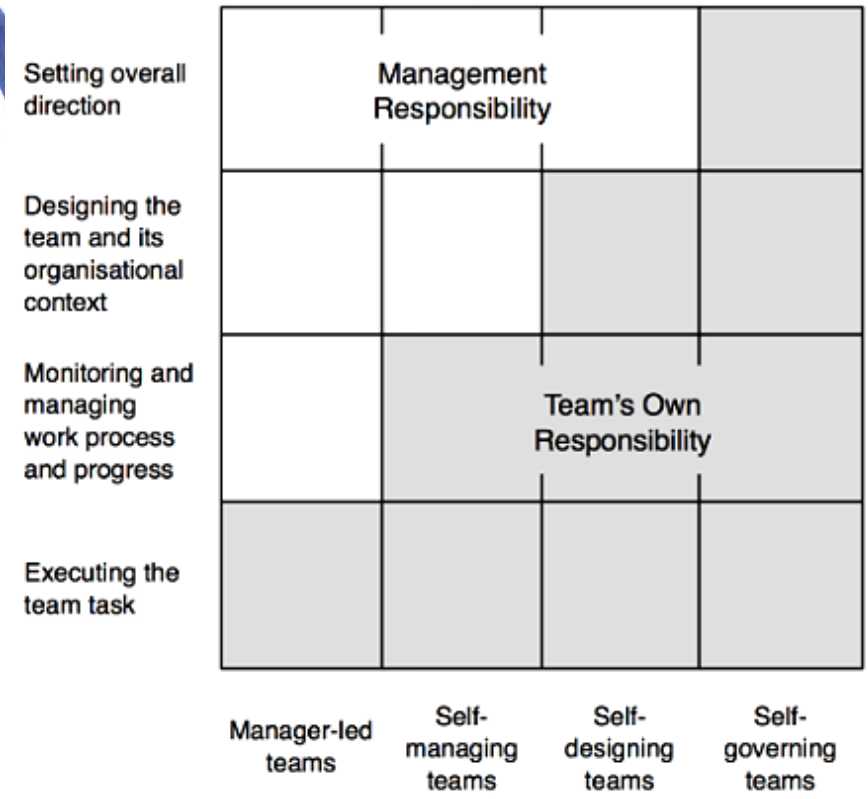
Self-organization is one of the fundamental tenets of Agile. The Agile Manifesto includes the principle, “The best architectures, requirements, and designs emerge from self-organizing teams.” Self-organization is not absolute but within the bounds of a context. In The Biology of Business, John Henry Clippinger writes about self-organizing teams:

Self-organization does not mean that workers instead of managers engineer an organization design. It does not mean letting people do whatever they want to do. It means that management commits to guiding the evolution of behaviors that emerge from the interaction of independent agents instead of specifying in advance what effective behavior is.

In a team there are four functions:

- Designing and constructing a team and arranging for needed organizational support for the goal of the team.
- Setting the directions for the team to achieve organizational goals in general and team goals in particular.
- Goal achievement by executing the work.
- Monitoring and managing the work process to keep the variance within tolerance limits and updating the goals due to dynamic environment.

These four core functions depending upon who is responsible – management or team, J Richard Hackman developed an authority matrix to depict teams’ self-organization.

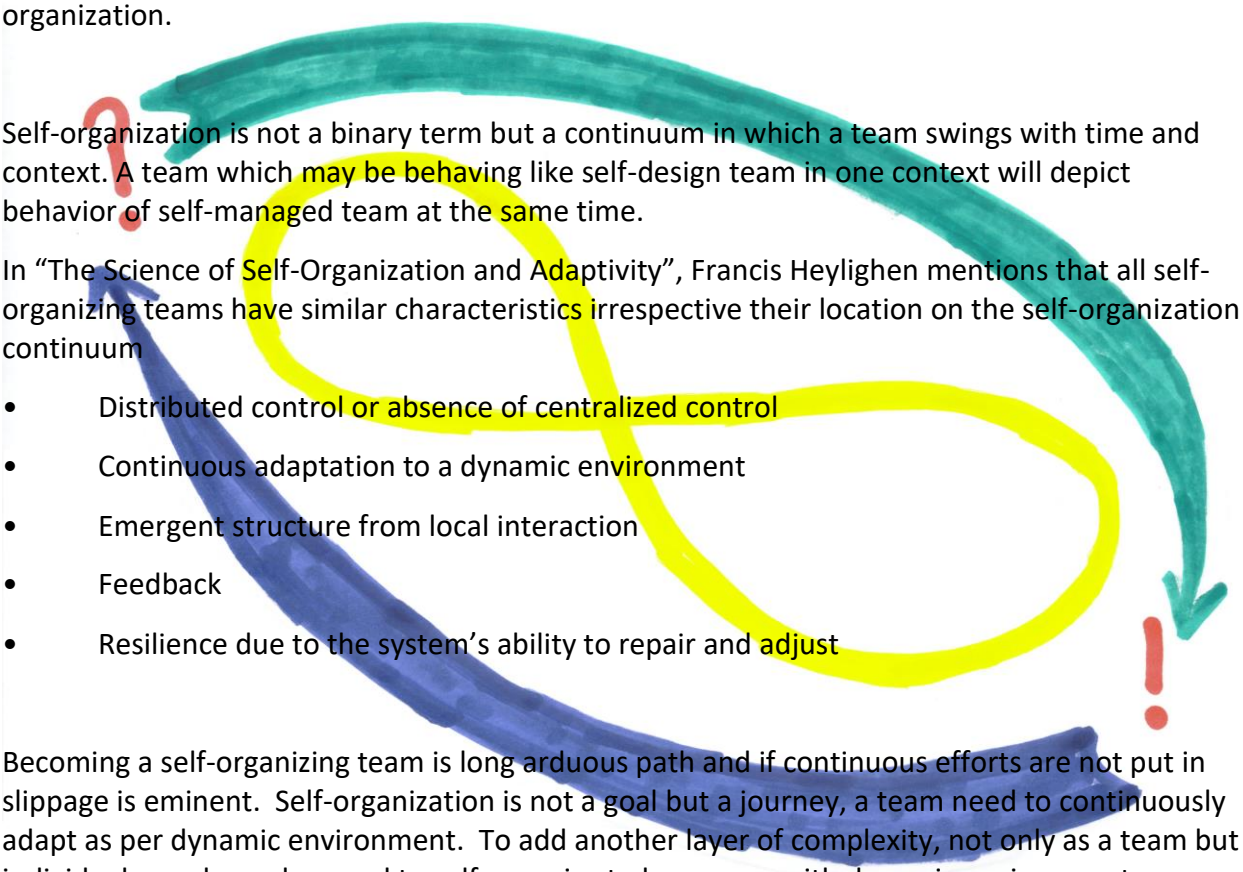


- In Manager-led teams members only execute the work while managers monitor and manage work processes, design the context, and set the direction. Functional silos in organizations are typical examples of this type of teams.

- In Self-managing teams members execute the tasks and manage progress. A typical Scrum team utilizes this approach.

- In Self-designing teams members execute the tasks, manage progress, and design & develop the team within the organizational set up. In matured Agile organizations, we find Scrum teams at this level of self-organization.

- In Self-governing teams execute of tasks, manage progress, design & develop the team, and set up the overall direction. Most of the Lean Startup teams depict highest level of self-organization.



Self-organization is not a binary term but a continuum in which a team swings with time and context. A team which may be behaving like self-design team in one context will depict behavior of self-managed team at the same time.

In "The Science of Self-Organization and Adaptivity", Francis Heylighen mentions that all self-organizing teams have similar characteristics irrespective their location on the self-organization continuum

- Distributed control or absence of centralized control
- Continuous adaptation to a dynamic environment
- Emergent structure from local interaction
- Feedback
- Resilience due to the system's ability to repair and adjust

Becoming a self-organizing team is long arduous path and if continuous efforts are not put in slippage is eminent. Self-organization is not a goal but a journey, a team need to continuously adapt as per dynamic environment. To add another layer of complexity, not only as a team but individual members also need to self-organize to keep pace with dynamic environment.

Self-organizing teams are based on contradictory but very effective balance of similarities and diversity which brings in cross function aspect.