Thoughts on Team of Teams, General Stanley McChrystal, U.S. Army, Retired

There are many things to like about General Stanley McChrystal’s book[[1]](#footnote-1). It is full of a[[2]](#footnote-2) first-person account of challenges, experiments and results as well as references to the history of management science. Evaluation of organizations is explained with the necessary theory as well as known examples of applications. It is very practical with a clear message and a tone to encourage action. But at the same time very open-ended inviting for further reading and analysis.

Team of Teams defines the team-based organization as the starting point: The assumption is the team approach works but scaling teams in a large organization lose the benefits of small teams. The team approach promises more than the sum of the team members. The team members, with their complementary skills and shared goal, achieve more than what they could do by themselves. A certain level of autonomy is required to unleash this potential. Which means the organization should trust the team as much as team members to trust each other. It is these essential properties of teamwork, shared goal and autonomy, makes it difficult to scale it for large organizations.

I believe there is little to contest the benefit of teams even though there are many cases we do not even get the benefits of small teams. Perhaps it is time to make a disclaimer. Team of Teams is written based on personal experiences from the U.S. Army, specifically special forces involved in the Middle East. It does a very good job to show that it is applicable to different industries, different contexts. I read it with my personal experiences in software development. I do not claim that my thoughts can easily be applied to industries since my personal experience is rather limited and did not do the extensive research required to make such a claim.

The term “team” is one of the overused terms of our era. We use it generously whenever we refer to a unit of more than one person. I even heard “one person team”. Recently, preparing for a discussion, I tried to clarify myself the different use cases and find out that the terms “team”, “workgroup”, “group” are all considered as “team”. However, not just they are different, they might be the right or wrong approach based on circumstances or the expectations. A workgroup might be a better choice than a team for a particular problem or the skillset available.

It acknowledges the limitation of teams in a large organization and seeks a solution based on two principles: Shared Consciousness and Local Empowerment. Both need to be accomplished at the same time (one without the other does not work) to reach the desired agility of self-governing organizations.

Shared consciousness refers to the context where the organization lives and acts.

1. <https://www.mcchrystalgroup.com/insights-2/teamofteams/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Grammerly suggest to add “a” here [↑](#footnote-ref-2)