Starfish and spider

1. This book was very informative. This was the first time I've read anything about organizational management and it was extremely easy to understand and the multiple examples in each chapter made it very easy to grasp each concept. I enjoyed the comparison between centralization and decentralization throughout the entire book. The most interesting part of the book to me would be the breakdown of the 8 principles of decentralization. When attacked, a decentralized organization tends to become even more open and decentralized: Not only did the Apaches survive the Spanish attacks, but amazingly, the attacks served to make them even stronger.

When the Spanish attacked them, the Apaches became even more decentralized and even more difficult to conquer (Brafman, 2006, p. 21). I found this first principle very intriguing. I never realized that a decentralized organization could be so successful. It makes you start thinking early in the book about which way of management is best. It's almost a brain challenge to rethink centralization, which is the way most organizations are managed. It's easy to mistake starfish for spiders: The breakdown of a starfish compared to a spider is extremely clever.

Explaining the anatomy of a starfish and how cutting one arm off only makes the starfish regenerate into two entities was brilliant. You could visual an organization becoming larger and stronger by how a starfish survives. In turn, the visualization of the anatomy of a spider was great too. If you cut off an arm (or one department in an organization) you weaken the spider or beheading the spider (CEO), you cripple and kill the spider (or organization). I really enjoyed this comparison of the two systems this way.

An open system doesn't have central intelligence; the intelligence is spread throughout the system: This was also very interesting to me. I liked the example they used about AA meetings and how Bill W. adopted the starfish approach. There is no central command and countless numbers of chapters because it is an open system. No one person holds the power of this organization making it flexible, equal, and constantly changing. Open systems can easily mutate: The Apaches did not—and could not—plan ahead about how to deal with the European invaders, but once the Spanish showed up, Apache society easily mutated.

They went from living in villages to being nomads. The decision didn't have to be approved by headquarters. The AA meetings were also used as an example. The AA meetings didn't just stop as alcohol abuse meetings; they became more. These meetings became treatment for all addictions, such as gambling or food. As soon as an outside force presents itself, the decentralized organization quickly mutates to meet the new challenge or need (Brafman, 2006, p. 41).

The decentralized organization sneaks up on you: For a century, the recording industry was owned by a handful of corporations, and then a bunch of hackers altered the face of the industry. We'll see this pattern repeat itself across different sectors and in different industries. As industries become decentralized, overall profits decrease: The combined revenues of the remaining fourwere 25 percent less than they had been in 2001. Where did the revenues go?

The revenue disappeared. Put people into an open system and they'll automatically want to contribute: The Wikipedia example was perfect to

portray this principle. The fact that Wikipedia is an open source program and the makers of this site do nothing to intervene is extremely trusting. If hackers come onto pages, the people correct their vandalism immediately. It was great to see people working together (even if it is virtually) on a common interest. They work better together, without a " boss," than most people do under centralized management.

When attacked, centralized organizations tend to become even more centralized: Because there is no central location of power it is very effective for decentralized to become more powerful. Decentralized organizations do not wait for orders; they act together as one, but separate entities. Centralized organizations are a downward spiral of power. The power comes from one place (corporate CEO's) and trickles down stream the bottom (where is issues are usually resolved). The more problems that happen, the more upper management gets involved in issues they don't honestly know how to solve.

This is how most organizations, unfortunately are run. I'll go back to the example used about the storm evacuation from the beginning of the book. Hundreds of people died because corporate management did not see the threat of the storm until it was too late. The change of command took too long to take action. In a decentralized organization, each person could have made their own decision in this situation. The two variables (people and culture) differ between decentralized and centralized organizations. Because we are more familiar with centralized organizations, people and culture are the same throughout the system.

Communication patterns, jargon, staff treatment, and views of customer (to name a few) are laid out in procedure manuals and remain the same throughout a system. For example, at Allegheny General each department has a system wide procedure manual on protocol for patient/family treatment. Each manual is written the same and expected to be followed by every department. This is just one way to keep order in a centralized organization. There are consequences for not following these procedures, as well. Now, for decentralized organizations, they do not have procedures in place for how people and the culture of the company should interact.

I feel in a decentralized system, the people and culture interact well together because there is no specific order on how to do so. Wikipedia, for example, is an excellent way of how people and culture interact. Giving the people freedom to alter almost everything within Wikipedia makes these people work harder and appreciate the work that is collectively done. The culture of the website is consistent and very well respected by the " members. " There are no norms, procedures, laws, or rules. People and culture interactions within this system are flawless and effortless. 3.

The organization I will use is the co-ed business fraternity I was a member of for 3 years during my undergrad degree; Alpha Kappa Psi. The frat was more of a hybrid of the two systems. For example, the frat was centralized because there were clear roles of " management. " There was a president, vice president, and frat advisor who oversaw everything we did. This could be viewed as a hierarchy of power. There were also different positions such as vice president of philanthropy, alumni relations, or pledges. Conversely, the frat could be viewed as slightly decentralized.

Each vice president would break into several different groups. For example, vice president of philanthropy would invite numerous members of the frat to join their group. In that group, everyone was equal. Each member of the group would express thoughts and ideas and together they would be in charge of all philanthropy matters. In some way, there is a decentralized aspect to this because there is no apparent leader within the group but the vice president would report to the president of the frat, giving this a centralized system feel, as well. Personally, it did not matter who was who in this organization.

Together, as a whole fraternity, discussions were made as one. Even though there were " assigned" positions of power, we functioned as an equal group with the same focus, not as a hierarchy of power. The catalyst of the frat would be the president (or Nant'an). They had to have a genuine interest in others, have numerous connections throughout the organization and with others, a desire to help and inspire everyone within the frat, and they had a hands-off approach; did not interfere with, or try to control the behavior of the contributing members of the decentralized organization (The Starfish and the spider, 26).

I feel the last statement about the hands-off approach really describes the most important trait of our president. In order for each group within the frat (philanthropy) to accomplish their goals, the president had to trust that issues were being resolved and new ideas were emerging. This catalyst kept order but knew when to step back and let their members " run the show. "