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What Are Self-Organising Teams?
“Knowledge workers have to manage themselves. They have to have autonomy”, leadership guru Peter Drucker states in his Management Challenges for the 21st Century.

This resonates with the Agile idea that “self-organising teams choose how best to accomplish their work, rather than being directed by others outside the team.” (Scrum Guide). But what are self-organising teams? What is self-organisation about? What qualifies a group of individuals to be a team?

Let’s start with the latter question. What are teams? In line with team expert J. Richard Hackman we see that this is often far from being clear. The term works a bit like a Rorschach test: people read into it what they wish, they have different things in mind when they think and talk of teams. In many cases real teams get confused with so-called co-acting groups. Whereas co-acting groups consist of people working in proximity to one another but not depending on what the others do to complete their respective jobs, real teams have four features:

- first, joint tasks to fulfil a compelling mission;
- second, clear boundaries in terms of information flow, alignment with other organisational units, resources or decision-making policies;
- third, authority to self-manage within these boundaries; and
- fourth, stability over some reasonable period of time.

In deciding the extent of a team’s authority, one must mindfully consider who is in the best position to handle each of four functions that must be fulfilled by any organisational unit:

- setting directions for the team, i.e. specifying the organisational objectives, the core purpose or mission that spawn the myriad of smaller tasks;
- designing the performing unit and arrange for needed organisational support for the work i.e. structuring tasks, deciding who will be involved in performing them, establishing norms of conduct for work behaviour, and making sure teams members have the resources and assistance they need to carry out their work;
- monitoring and managing the work process, i.e. collecting and interpreting data about how the work is proceeding and initiating corrective action as needed;
- executing the work, i.e. applying physical or mental energy to accomplish tasks.

By devoting these core functions to the responsibility areas of either management or team, Hackman provides us with an authority matrix to distinguish four levels of team self-organisation (Figure 1)
Since the world is not just black and white, we see more than just one form of self-organisation. To us, self-organisation is rather an umbrella term for a continuum encompassing:

- **manager-led teams** that leave team members only the authority for task execution while managers monitor and manage work processes, design the context and set the direction. From our point of view, many expert groups in functional silos as well as traditional project management “teams” are practical examples of this set-up;

- **self-managing teams** put members not just in charge for task execution but also for managing their progress. Within IT, we see a lot of Kanban teams applying this approach either focusing on team tasks or on team-bridging value streams;

- **self-designing teams** give members the authority to modify the design of their team and/or aspects of the organisational context in which they operate. Most real management teams are in this position as well as some Scrum teams especially when Lean/Agile is scaled;

- **self-governing teams** have responsibility for all four core functions as shown by corporate boards of directors, worker cooperatives or start-ups.

Despite all these structural differences there are a few criteria that all kinds of self-organising teams have in common. According to Francis Heylighen, author of “The Science of Self-Organization and Adaptivity” all self-organising systems are characterised by:

- **distributed control**, i.e. absence of centralised control,
- **continuous adaptation** to a changing environment,
- **emergent structure** from local interaction,
- **feedback**, both positive and negative,
- **resilience** due to the system’s ability to repair and adjust.
Referring to the original “principle of the self-organising dynamic system” as formulated by the cybernetician Ross Ashby in 1947, Heylighen helps us to understand that self-organisation is kind of the natural process of how global order arises out of the local interactions between the components of an initially disordered system. Thus, self-organisation is the rule, not the exception of systemic behaviour. Even in the agile world it is neither “a breath of fresh air” (Ken Schwaber) nor “a secret sauce” (Jeff Sutherland).

Despite all the fashionable metaphors we use, **self-organisation is a law that is applicable to many different systems**. There is a broad variety of examples from neuroscience, physics, chemistry and biology: the brain with all its connected neurone that construct mental models without relying to single control; plants such as aspen groves the largest known living organisms on earth, each tree contacted to all others by the same underground root system; flocks of birds, gangs of elk or herds of sheep, being able to move together in a synchronised manner as if they were a single animal especially in avoiding danger or changing course; or ants creating a system of finding food out of seemingly random movements.

What conclusions can we draw from these insights? What do the laws of systemic behaviour mean for self-organising teams in a business environment? First of all, we should remind ourselves that **becoming a self-organising team does not happen overnight**. Nor is self-organisation something that happens one time and remains forever within the very same boundaries. As a matter of fact, a team is never done with the process of self-organisation. They have to continually reorganise themselves in a sense-and-respond manner to shifting demands and contexts. In other words, self-organisation is an ongoing process: whenever the set-up changes, the organisation and the team need to repeat the whole process.

Self-organisation is not just about the whole team within its specific organisational context. **Each team member has to self-organise as well** to figure out what to do and how to do it. And every day, everyone on the team has to coordinate his or her self-organisation with the rest of the team. In order to synchronise, we run regular meetings such as the “Daily Standup”, “Operations Reviews” or “Retrospectives”.

Another pillar of all self-organising teams is that they **build on a tricky balance of similarity and difference**. Paradoxically, in order to effectively exploit their differences, team members need to share enough similarities. As German systems thinker Diether Gebert shows in his data-driven survey on innovative teams, teams have to grant each other some trust in the first place. Without a certain amount of trust in advance they can neither explore their individual backgrounds nor inspect and adapt current work processes. Later on, an appropriate balance of recognition and reward as well as fair play are important factors for further self-empowerment. Disrespect kills self-organisation in a similar way to social loafing.

It is a truism that self-organising teams need effective interaction to realise their full potential. For teams holds true what Russell Ackoff says about systems in general: its performance **is not the sum of the performance of its parts taken separately, but the product of their interaction**. But as we have already seen self-organisation does not mean the team gets to decide everything themselves. Self-organising teams are not boundary-less. On the contrary, a clear set of expectations and responsibilities is needed to contain self-organisation. In her landmark article on “Conditions for Self-Organizing in Human Systems” Glenda H. Eoyang points out three conditions that must be met for the self-organising process to generate coherent patterns:

1. **A containing (C) boundary** that surrounds the system to define its identity. Simply speaking, there is no clear “self” without a clear separation of “the other ones”. This kind of container builds on organisational pillars such as a clear-cut mission, a compelling direction and challenging goals, operating guidelines and clear decision-making policies.
2. **Significant differences (D)** such as different knowledge, experience, education, age, gender or cultural background. High performing teams know how to acknowledge and incorporate the diversity of the team and how to build on the differences that make a difference.
3. **Transforming exchange (E)** guiding the interactions both within the team and with its environment. According to Eoyang, this transfer of information, energy or material between interdependent people or units is critical to the ability to self-organise into system-wide patterns.
Far from being a pure constraint, a boundary always marks an opportunity for communication. As such, a boundary has effects in both directions. In Margaret Wheatley’s words: “if people are free to make their own decisions, guided by a clear organisational identity for them to reference, the whole system develops greater coherence and strength. The organisation is less controlling but more orderly.”

As part of a bigger system, each unit of the CDE model is dependent on a supportive context. In Hackman’s metaphorical words: “If a well designed work team is a seedling, then the organisational context is the soil in which it is planted, the milieu that provides the nutrients needed for it to grow and bear fruit.” Less metaphorically speaking, according to Hackman, the contextual support for self-organising teams consists basically of four sub-systems:

- **information** – in terms of providing teams the data that members need to competently plan and execute their work
- **infrastructure** – in terms of appropriate physical space (a factor many co-located teams struggle with), technical infrastructure and money.
- **education** – in terms of any training, coaching or technical assistance the team may need
- **reward** – in terms of providing positive, economic as well as symbolic consequences for good team performance.

Coming back to Eoyang’s model of self-organisation, we can now draw a simple picture that shows how container, difference, exchange and context play together:

**Figure 2: Expanded CDE model**

Figure 2 has a collection of elements of different size, shape and colour in its centre, representing team members with different background, strengths and skill-set. As the linking arrows show, the members are connected with each other, building up a cross-functional team by intense exchange/communications. The whole team interaction is surrounded by a boundary, partly dotted to indicate that this container is an open rather than a closed system. Far from being a classical black box for its environment, the team is dependent on its environment. They need a supportive context in terms of the indicated sub-systems of infrastructure, information, education and reward. And they need an external agent, represented by a snowflake symbol, who is responsible for this support. This is the role of the line manager.
Although eliminated from the picture to keep it as simple as possible, the interdependence of the team, its connectedness in terms of value stream and the necessary customer focus and organisational awareness are key to any self-organising process.

**Conclusion**

We have observed that real teams have a compelling mission, clear boundaries, authority to self-manage and stability. We have observed that self-organisation in teams is built on a tricky balance of similarities and differences between team members; self-organisation requires clear boundaries and a supportive context; self-organisation is characterised by distributed control, continuous adaptation, emergent structure, feedback and resilience. Lastly we have observed that self-organisation takes time.

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**Why Do We Need Self-Organising Teams?**

**Posted by Sigi Kaltenecker and Peter Hundermark on Aug 09, 2014 | 2 Discuss**

“The best architectures, requirements, and designs emerge from self-organising teams”, the Agile Manifesto announces. This raises a few questions: What are self-organising teams? Why do we need them? What difference do self-organising teams make? How can we support self-organisation? Could there be any way to help this special kind of teamwork to emerge? Surprisingly, there is relatively little material on what self-organising teams are about and how to support them effectively. Organisational development consultant Sigi Kaltenecker and agile coach Peter Hundermark are writing a short book “Leading Self-Organising Teams” to be published by InfoQ later in 2014.

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**Why Do We Need Self-Organising Teams?**

From the 1980s onward, we experienced a tremendous amount of changes:

- political changes, such as the end of the Soviet Union and the block of Eastern European countries;
- societal changes such as intensified migration or higher educational levels in many countries;
- demographic changes as documented by higher life expectancy and decreasing birth rates in the Western hemisphere;
- ecological changes, mostly referred to as global warming and climate change;
- technological changes, e.g. in medicine, biology or communication technology, giving birth to a new generation of “digital natives”;
- economic changes, from the tyranny of shareholder value and the rise of the so-called BRICS countries to the global financial crises in 2008.

All these changes bring with them new demands. Organisations have no longer been able to choose whether they want to respond to these demands or not. Change has become mandatory. Trying to hold onto the status
quo is like trying to keep the leaves on trees in autumn. For an organisation to be successful, it must adequately deal with the risks and use the opportunities every change brings along. In other words, the organisation must keep up with, or ideally be ever so slightly ahead of, the current market demands. How inconvenient then that this market behaves unpredictably. That which is ‘top’ today can be a ‘flop’ tomorrow; yesterday’s success factor can become a burden overnight.

“Business agility” turns out to be the new mantra for the successful running of an organisation in the 21st century. Improvement and innovation have long since become mandatory for any organisational unit. Available opportunities should be used, new possibilities discovered, competitive edges honed.

Self-organising agile teams seem to be kind of a miracle solution to many of these problems. They are said to:

- achieve better results
- deliver more business value
- collaborate more effectively than micro-managed teams
- learn faster
- work with more motivation and fun.
- be more rewarding

While many managers seem to be busy projecting their wishes onto self-organising teams, they are blanking out an essential blind spot: self-organisation is as much about the management as it is about the team. The need for more agility is also nurtured by the fact that traditional command-and-control management turned out to be dysfunctional. Stifling bureaucracy, suffocating control systems and the empty rituals of planning and performance management are just a few symptoms of this dysfunctionality.

According to current studies, such as The Shift Index from Deloitte Center for the Edge, only one in every five employees is fully engaged, 75% of all employees lack motivation and passion, and only 15% of all teams are able to realise their full potential. Besides, there is growing amount of “change fatigue” as to the fact that many change initiatives do not achieve the intended goals. Rather than commitment, these initiatives are more met with an attitude of “not again!” There are no comprehensive figures but various sample surveys point to a proportion of between 60% and 80% of projects ending in failure.
plans, pre-designed milestones and the prediction of clear cut outcomes. Unfortunately, all the turbulence around us make a mockery of our plans and predictions. As Meg Wheatley arouses us: “It’s time to realise that we will never cope with this new world using our old maps.”

Let’s examine a map depicting the organisational paradigm common in the last century with a modern view to better understand what the necessary change is about (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>20th Century</th>
<th>21st Century</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organisations as centralised functions and silos</td>
<td>Organisations as whole systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predictable cause and effect relationships</td>
<td>Complex networks and webs of relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central coordination and control is required</td>
<td>Decentral processes of self-organisation and self-regulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hierarchy and bureaucracy</td>
<td>Lean networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primarily orientated around shareholder value</td>
<td>Balanced orientation around all stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration orientated towards short-term profit</td>
<td>Orientation towards long-term success through continuous improvement and innovation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change is project-driven and reactive</td>
<td>Change is seen as continuous and adaptive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Paradigms of Organisations

The table summarises some of the key differences between mechanistic and systemic thinking as outlined by Russell Ackoff more than 25 years ago. Even though the table tends to polarise a bit too much, it outlines the systemic context of past and future-oriented leadership. The dominant organisational paradigms resonate with the basic values and principles of two very different models of how to manage and lead: functional vs. holistic set-up, linear cause and effect vs. complexity thinking, administration vs. continuous innovation, shareholder value vs. interests of all stakeholders; change as exception vs. change as key driver of any business.

Thus, the former administrator of standardised business processes is supposed to become an organisational designer for high-performing teams. The ability to set clear goals, establish modes of decision-making, and free up resources are also a part of this. The trouble is that the principles and values of the mechanistic paradigm are still pretty much in place. They still guide old-school management practices in many organisations—and, perhaps even worse, the educational concepts at universities. Despite all the new challenges around us, the traditional MBA is still seen as key asset to qualify a manager.

But is business administration really what is needed to deal with the current challenges? As Jeremy Hope and Robin Fraser, founders of the highly influential Beyond Budgeting Round Table [hyperlink], put it: “For most organizations today, their success factors have changed and their strategy is changing, but their management processes, leadership styles, and cultures are lagging behind.”

This raises the question of what a future-oriented leadership model can look like? What is needed to meet the current challenges? Why do we think that effectively leading self-organising teams is key to succeed in the 21st century? What values, skills and techniques are needed to support rather than hinder self-organisation? Over the course of the last decade we got a lot of answers to these questions. From a variety of modern literature and from our own consulting experience we observe some recurring themes:

- old-fashioned command and control gives way to a modern culture that respects self-control without losing sight of the organisation-wide need for coordination;
new forms of network-oriented leadership appear alongside hierarchical management in order to use the available expertise optimally, last but not least in response to environmental dynamics;

if managers still try to control both people and activity, constricting team member’s freedom and inhibiting local change, they only create the conditions that threaten the organisation’s survival;

to focus on self-control is the only way to show respect and effectively exploit/capitalise the capabilities of well-trained knowledge workers;

encouraging decentralised decision-making while keeping overview by applying visual management, establishing fast feedback loops and selected team performance metrics is a sure path to better alignment and intrinsic motivation of teams;

centralised, “heroic management”, the role model of the one superior director or captain, gives way to a model of decentralised, post-heroic “leadership as a team sport” that explicitly builds on mutual relationships and fast feedback loops.

Far from being purely theoretical, our old maps are kind of the source code for dysfunctional behaviour—and the root cause of numerous organisational problems. On the one hand these maps create a high degree of demotivation. There is an increasing amount of turnover and burnout, often leading to the loss of key players, who are tired of fighting windmills. This results in an obvious gap between what companies must achieve and what people actually want to invest. No wonder that the average life expectancy of organisations is meanwhile below 20 years. On the other hand, managers are forced to acknowledge a fundamental paradox: that they are individually responsible for the behaviour of a complex social system they cannot control. Amidst a turbulent environment, management inevitably has to deal with an often overwhelming amount of uncertainty, unpredictability and risk.

Given the present amount of complexity no single person is able to capture let alone process it appropriately. Mental overload is inevitable. Best case a manager can build on certain probabilities, worst case her actions and decisions are purely random. No “management-by” method offers an escape from this fate, whether it pretends to be scientific or not. Managers have to accept the difficulty of controlling social systems. Rather than superior directors of their organisations, managers are more like the proverbial fly ruling on the trunk of an elephant. The fly is convinced that it is steering the elephant, the elephant does not mind, and it makes the ride more interesting.

Both external and internal factors underscore the need to change how we run our organisations. In order to become more agile we must transfer more power and authority to people closer to the customer. We have to trust them with information and give them time to think, learn and improve. At the same time structural costs must be slashed and bureaucracy reduced if not eliminated. Lean is the right keyword for this effort.

The only way to achieve these goals is to empower our teams. We have to allow them to use the full amount of their expertise, not just to execute their work but to monitor and control themselves, make their own decisions and even design their processes. This may be seen as a question of natural respect. As Drucker pointed out some 30 years ago, knowledge workers such as IT experts have to have autonomy. Our experience shows that effectively using is both a question of individual as well as team training and organisational change. Again, self-organisation does not happen overnight. Since the containers for this self-organisation are still restricted in various ways, let alone chronically disturbed by micro-management and lacking work design, to capitalise on self-organising processes needs fundamental changes. If effective empowerment can be seen as an equation of freedom multiplied with capability, we need both to learn new things and unlearn old patterns.

This equation reminds us that self-organising is not a technical process. Although we have to deal with a lot of structural issues, there are always emotions involved: positive ones such as pride, excitement or fun, but also negative emotions such as confusion, uncertainty or fear. Both categories of emotions are two sides of the same coin and typical phenomenons of change processes.
From this point of view, it comes as no surprise that in most cases both management and team feel a measure of ambivalence when it is about to transfer authority. As always, when we question things people build their self-esteem on (e.g. roles, responsibilities, resources) some may feel overwhelmed while others are puzzled. As change management pioneers Doppler and Lauterburg show, there are three basic questions that immediately pop up when it comes to change in the first place:

**Do I need to do this?** Do I understand why we need self-organising teams? Are these teams mandatory or are there any alternatives? What do we expect of self-organisation?

**Can I do this?** Am I able to deal with what self-organising will mean to us? Do I have all the skills I need to become self-organising? What are my chances for good results? What counts as success under the new conditions?

**Do I want it?** Is self-organising interesting? What’s in it for me? Is there any risk of losing something: money, relationships, career prospects? Can I expect to gain something from the change?

“We’re all for improvement, but why do we have to change?”, recently a member of an operations team pointed out the ambivalence many feel towards self-organising processes. These processes cannot be simply imposed, professional facilitation and change management is needed from the very beginning:

- profound information—why self-organisation?
- clear expectations—how to measure the success?
- professional facilitation—how to guide the transformation?
- training and coaching—what do you need to know and do?

**Conclusion**

We have observed that change is the only constant in our world and “business agility” is demanded. Our old maps for running organisations are no longer valid; we need new ones based on systemic thinking. The devolution of power and granting of autonomy to the knowledge worker is essential to regain and retain their engagement. Self-organising teams guided by coach-leaders are central to the new operating system. If we agree then that self-organising teams are something we both need and want, the consequent challenge is to discover what kind of new leadership skills are demanded to enable this self-organisation to take place, and how aspirant leaders might acquire these. We will explore this in the third and final article in this series “what is Leading Self-organising Teams all about?”

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What Is Leading Self-Organising Teams All About?
Posted by Sigi Kaltenecker and Peter Hundermark on Aug 25, 2014

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This is the third and final article that will connect readers with the topic. The series began with “what are self-organising teams?” and continued with “why do we need self-organising teams?”. The current article takes on the topic of what it means to lead a self-organising team and thus provides an introduction to the rest of the material in the mini-book.

What Is Leading Self-Organising Teams All About?
What exactly do we have to do to capitalise on self-organisation? How can we best support our teams? What special kind of leadership is needed?

In our previous article we contrasted the traditional the idea of centralised “heroic management” with a post-heroic style of “leadership as a team sport”.

What we have learned from our interviews with diverse practitioners during the study on “Successful Agile Leadership” mirrors our own experience as managers and consultants who have been involved in different companies. The lesson, in a nutshell: effective cross-functional, hierarchy-bridging collaboration of different players is a key factor for success.

Figure 1 shows how we can distinguish traditional leadership from what we call leadership as a team sport. The circles in the figure represent team members as well as line managers (in grey), the lines with arrowheads represent the direction of communication and its intensity (bold lines for more intensity and frequency). Whereas the traditional model builds on one-way communication and the control of individual team members who are only loosely coupled, co-acting rather than working as a team, the model of leadership as a team sport has a very different set-up: all group members, including the manager are part of a network, communicating bidirectionally and equally.
of a network of relationships nurtured by intense communication that enables joint decision making. This makes up a real team.

Let us use the analogy of a soccer team to better describe what this might be about. What can we learn from soccer for leading in a dynamic environment? Perhaps, this is the most important lesson: to be successful as a team, i.e. to win a game depends, on the willingness and ability to help each other. This help builds on many skills:

- the general skill to professionally understand and master your specific role on the team (goal keeper, defender, mid-fielder, striker) and how this role is supposed to play together with the other roles in order to act as a real team;
- physical skills such as running and sprinting, blocking or tackling your opponent, jumping, heading or bending as needed;
- technical skills with the ball such as properly passing and receiving, dribbling and tricky, holding and kicking;
- tactical skills such as understanding the whole concept of the game as well as the flow of certain moves and being able to play without the ball. For instance in situations where each player has to decide whether to be part of an attack or stay behind to secure the defence, running to be in the right place at the right time, running to a certain place to draw the attention of your opponent away from other players, and the like;
- strategic skills in order to keep overview of the current situation on the field, see the big picture of the game and act accordingly, be aware of special opportunities to attack and score and exploit the well-trained routines of so-called standard situations (e.g. free kicks or corners) and to respond to changing game situations as quickly as possible no matter if the changes are caused by your own team or your opposition.

For sure, the contribution of each player in terms of passes completed and tactical importance is always different. As the so-called network analysis shows (see centre Figure 2), there are always players who are more active (as shown by the different size of the individual circles). But this does not necessarily mean that the most active ones dominate the whole game. Part of the fascination of team sports is that everybody can score the decisive goal—even the goal-keeper, as we know from some of the most spectacular moments of soccer history.
What is the role of the coach? Does he control the game? Is he steering his team? Does he monitor every move? Is he involved at all? Actually, his influence is quite limited. Once the game starts, a soccer team is a self-organising unit following a very specific dynamic. Regardless of whether a coach presents himself as one of the stars, jumps around in his coaching zone, shouts instructions to key players, or insults the referee—there is no opportunity to control what is going on in the field. The team is on its own to perform the best they can.

Does this mean that a coach is superfluous? Definitely not. From a systemic point of view she has a high influence on the team’s composition, their tactics, training program, playing style and so on. She can also replace some players during the game and she can use the break between the halves to run a review and change tactics. Interestingly, the main task of the coach is observation, as German systems thinker Fritz B. Simon has pointed out. The coach observes each individual player as well as the specific exchanges of the whole team and their interaction with the opposing team. Furthermore, the coach provides professional feedback based on his observations. In line with Simon, we might say that the primary purpose of the coach is about creating the right level of awareness by establishing constructive feedback loops.

We can begin to see that team leadership as well as organisational intelligence in general is not something that resides in a few experts, regardless of their status as specialists, key players or formal managers. Instead, it is a system-wide capacity directly related to how open the organisation is to new, especially disconfirming, information, and how effectively that information can be interpreted by anyone in the organisation. Even more, systems thinkers state that leadership is best thought of as a behaviour, not a role. We need acts of leadership in various situations, but this need can be satisfied by many different people, and by different people at different times. At one moment I can be leading and at another I am being led.

Building on our analogy, we would like to state that leadership in the 21st century is more about the collective than it is about a single individual. And since we also learned long ago from Drucker that “the purpose of business is to create (and keep) a customer”, so it follows that it is definitely also more about the relationships of this collective with its customers.

Again, this team-based approach to leadership resonates with the reports from Agile practitioners interviewed for our study on “Successful Agile Leadership”. Across different companies, background and expertise the hierarchy-bridging and cross-functional collaboration of different experts has been seen as a decisive factor for top results. Leadership emerged from various sources and was not limited to formal management positions.

The practical experience resonates with theoretical discussions of leadership as a trait of the system rather than that of an individual manager. With the publication of Katzenbach’s and Smith’s classic, “The Wisdom of Teams: Creating the High-Performing Organization”, shared leadership became a part of the lexicon.

Shared leadership means that all team members:
- take on responsibility for the overall success just as much as for individual development;
- achieve and “sell” results together;
- distribute authority situationally in favour of technical as well as social competence;
- establish network-like communication models;
- bring decisions approved by all colleagues to the centre of actions;
- force critical examination of work processes and, if necessary, adaptation; and
- subject the quality of collaboration to regular consideration.

With his model of a “leaderful practice”, Joseph A. Raelin goes even a step further. He defines four qualities of contemporary leadership. From Raelin’s point of view leadership is concurrent in terms of the simultaneity of leadership performance; collective in terms of a shared responsibility that cannot be delegated to hierarchical superiors; collaborative in terms of intensive teamwork; and compassionate in terms of each team member supporting the other.
Conclusion
In the initial article we defined a “self-organising team”. We observed that real teams have a compelling mission, clear boundaries, authority to self-manage and stability. We observed that self-organisation in teams:
- is built on a tricky balance of similarities and differences between team members
- is characterised by distributed control, continuous adaptation, emergent structure, feedback and resilience
- requires a supportive context
- takes time

In the second article we argued for their need. We observed that change is the only constant in our world and “business agility” is demanded. Our old maps for running organisations were no longer valid; we needed new ones based on systemic thinking. The devolution of power and granting of autonomy to the knowledge worker was essential to regain and retain their engagement. We concluded that self-organising teams guided by coach-leaders were central to the new operating system.

If we agree then that self-organising teams are something we both need and want, the consequent challenge is to discover what kind of new leadership skills are demanded to enable this self-organisation to take place, and how aspirant leaders might acquire these.

This article suggests a new, post-heroic model of “leadership as a team sport”. We use the role of the sports team coach as metaphor for the modern leader. We suggest that such leaders are unable to directly control the work of their team members, yet we argue that they nevertheless still have an essential part to play in the organisation.

The further chapters of the forthcoming book “Leading Self-Organising Teams” are devoted to describing and populating a simple model for leading self-organising teams. The model is based on three interconnecting elements: values, skills and tools. We define four foundational values and four essential skills areas that make up this style of leadership. Then we provide a generous toolbox of simple and practical, yet highly effective tools related to each skill that we have learned and applied in our own practice of leading teams and helping others to do so.

References
- Kaltenecker, Siegfried and Spielhofer, Thomas: “Successful Agile Leadership”