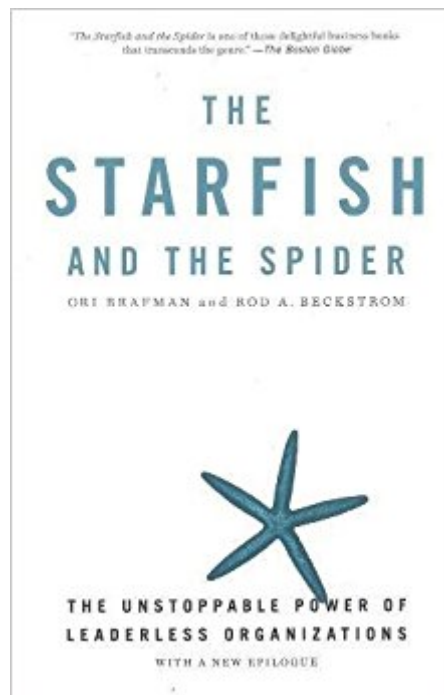


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# The Starfish And The Spider: The Unstoppable Power Of Leaderless Organizations



## Synopsis

If you cut off a spider's head, it dies; if you cut off a starfish's leg it grows a new one, and that leg can grow into an entirely new starfish. Traditional top-down organizations are like spiders, but now starfish organizations are changing the face of business and the world. What's the hidden power behind the success of Wikipedia, craigslist, and Skype? What do eBay and General Electric have in common with the abolitionist and women's rights movements? What fundamental choice put General Motors and Toyota on vastly different paths? Ori Brafman and Rod Beckstrom have discovered some unexpected answers, gripping stories, and a tapestry of unlikely connections. *The Starfish and the Spider* explores what happens when starfish take on spiders and reveals how established companies and institutions, from IBM to Intuit to the U.S. government, are also learning how to incorporate starfish principles to achieve success.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Brafman and Beckstrom, a pair of Stanford M.B.A.s who have applied their business know-how to promoting peace and economic development through decentralized networking, offer a breezy and entertaining look at how decentralization is changing many organizations. The title metaphor conveys the core concept: though a starfish and a spider have similar shapes, their internal structure is dramatically different— a decapitated spider inevitably dies, while a starfish can regenerate itself from a single amputated leg. In the same way, decentralized organizations, like the Internet, the Apache Indian tribe and Alcoholics Anonymous, are made up of many smaller units capable of operating, growing and multiplying independently of each other, making it very difficult for

a rival force to control or defeat them. Despite familiar examples—eBay, Napster and the Toyota assembly line, for example—there are fresh insights, such as the authors' three techniques for combating a decentralized competitor (drive change in your competitors' ideology, force them to become centralized or decentralize yourself). The authors also analyze one of today's most worrisome "starfish" organizations—al-Qaeda—though that group undermines the authors' point that the power of leaderless groups helps to demonstrate the essential goodness and trustworthiness of human beings. (Oct. 5) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

"The Starfish and the Spider is a compelling and important book."—Pierre Omidyar, CEO, Omidyar Network and Founder and Chairman, eBay Inc.  
"The Starfish and the Spider, like Blink, The Tipping Point, and The Wisdom of Crowds before it, showed me a provocative new way to look at the world and at business. It's also fun to read!"—Robin Wolaner, founder, Parenting Magazine and author, Naked in the Boardroom  
"A fantastic read. Constantly weaving stories and connections. You'll never see the world the same way again."—Nicholas J. Nicholas Jr., former Co-CEO, Time Warner  
"A must-read. Starfish are changing the face of business and society. This page-turner is provocative and compelling."—David Martin, CEO, Young Presidents' Organization  
"The Starfish and the Spider provides a powerful prism for understanding the patterns and potential of self-organizing systems."—Steve Juvetson, Partner, Draper Fisher Juvetson  
"The Starfish and the Spider lifts the lid on a massive revolution in the making, a revolution certain to reshape every organization on the planet from bridge clubs to global governments. Braffman and Beckstrom elegantly describe what is afoot and offer a wealth of insights that will be invaluable to anyone starting something new or rescuing something old amidst this vast shift."—Paul Saffo, Director, Institute for the Future  
"The Starfish and the Spider is great reading. [It has] not only stimulated my thinking, but as a result of the reading, I proposed ten action points for my own organization."—Professor Klaus Schwab, Executive Chairman, World Economic Forum

The Starfish and the Spider: The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organizations compares centralized and decentralized organizations. A centralized organization is much like a spider; cut off its head and the spider dies. A decentralized organization, on the other hand, is like a starfish. When an arm of the starfish is cut off, the starfish generates an entirely new body. Published in

2006, Brafman and Beckstrom explore and explain the increase in the number of decentralized organizations. Their discussions of organizations such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Napster, and Al-Qaeda make the concepts of decentralized organizations not only pertinent to today's economy and culture, but also understandable. The traditional top-down hierarchy of centralized organizations creates levels of bureaucracy that make change within an organization slow-going. By the time the change is implemented, it is out of date and in need of modification. These spider organizations have a command and control which dictates the movement of the organization; those employed must comply or risk being out of a job. A decentralized organization creates an environment where there is no head; all are equal and free to contribute to the changes and sustainment within an organization, acting as a form of distributed leadership. In this starfish organization, the members of the group must convince all other members to move and change; the collective make changes happen. Norms, not rules, control a starfish organization. The internet has changed how we view the world, the next generation of professionals and work-force employees will have grown up with access to knowledge, and the ability to contribute to that knowledge freely. Employees are looking for the catalyst for change to get the starfish moving, and then having that catalyst get out of the way so the employees can make the organization successful. This book is a key addition to professional reading lists for leaders and managers at all levels, educators and students, as well as employees within any organization.

This book points to and describes a style of leadership architecture more as by a docent than as an architect. There are deeper logics at play that need understanding if one is to attempt what is being described with any useful effect. However, it is good to understand that there exists a growing body of artifacts in the organizational arena that are the products of non-linear, distributed processes that seem to operate holographically among sapient populations to produce (buzzword alert!) synergistic organizational effects. What used to be called 'the informal organization' - what happens around the watercooler and the lunchroom - is now becoming the dominant modality in all areas of emergent anthropologic phenomena, beyond entrepreneurial commerce. I am finding this book is a useful resource for illuminating these new patterns for people who are on the cusp of transforming their own modes of participation and of adding value.

I read the book and had a chance to hear Ori talk two days later. I really liked the book to begin with, but after hearing Ori talk I really love the concept. The premise is that strictly hierarchal organizations don't do as well as more ad hoc organizations, e.g., a flock of birds, in volatile, uncertain, chaotic,

and ambiguous times. Yes. Often books like this tend to over state their points, but the Starfish and the Spider pokes fun at itself and explores the ragged edge of its own theory. It is also a very quick read. Well done!! highly recommend this book!! In service, Rich The Original Dr Games since 1993

What do you do when you've always charged for delivering a service or product and some Web site comes along and offers something much like it for free? That's been the question plaguing the music recording, news and software companies for some time. It's of great interest to me because I work in the newspaper industry. This book titled, "The Starfish and the Spider: The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organizations," takes a fascinating look at this phenomenon. Published in 2006 and written by Ori Brafman and Rod A. Beckstrom, "Starfish" looks at movements/organizations that defy the traditional leadership model of "Who's in charge?" Sometimes, no one is in charge. The Aztecs had Montezuma and a capital city, and were easily wiped out by the Spanish who killed the leader. The Apache had no centralized leader and no capital, and thus were better equipped to fight off attacks by armies from developed nations who looked for traditional targets to strike. But the book's authors say that also describes the recording music industry's attempts to fight off Napster: They effectively killed that one Web site, but their efforts antagonized people and spawned lots of imitators. The authors write that Craigslist provided an unexpected challenge to the newspaper industry. Why pay for a newspaper classified ad when you can advertise a product for free all over the world? Likewise, why subscribe to a newspaper when you can read it for free online? Newspapers learned to combine ad sales for print and online editions, as well as partnering with sites like CareerBuilder. After many newspapers dropped their attempts to charge subscriptions for online stories, some organizations are taking a second look at this model again. "Starfish" provided an eye-opening lesson for me in how my industry has been evolving, and I enjoyed reading this book.

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