

## NETWORKS AND ECOSYSTEM LEADERSHIP<sup>1</sup>

*How does one optimally organise complex ecosystems to achieve a shared challenge?<sup>2</sup> Is it possible to organise an ecosystem? Are there clear design principles that might help?*

*A key factor in achieving coherence of large, complex, ecosystems is creating a shared sense of purpose and understanding the activities taking place. By understanding the nature of its activities, leadership can cluster 'what is going on or needs to be going on' into one or more existing or emergent domains of work.*

*This allows the 'chunking's of ecosystem and its networks activities into semi-autonomous parts. This allows for the empowerment of local decision making, relevant information flows and distributed accountability and authority.*

*In addition to this clustering by domains of activities, large scale systems leadership requires a different set of meta competencies to galvanize and orchestrate diverse stakeholders. This chapter seeks to explore network galvanisation, activity chunking and systems leadership competencies.*

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Networks operate at different scales of complexity serving all manner of purpose. For example, businesses operate a range of networks serving diverse commercial needs. Some work in open eco-systems. Other networks exist for special interests, we know about terrorist networks and hear of the dark net. Social media connect relationship networks, promote and organise specific causes (e.g #MeTo, Extinction Rebellion, BLM, Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street). The internet has enabled the mushrooming of this networked and online phenomena.

Behind networks sit organisational structures that enable them to function. This chapter does not consider the organisational structures that need to support scaled commercial networks or platform organisations.

As networks scale up in terms of size, stakeholders, diverse purposes, we find ecosystems emerging around shared interests. Accompanying scale, comes complexity, uncertainty and ambiguity. COVID has shown us just how fragile we are and with it just how important this new world has become. This chapter focuses on analysing two specific examples, one being the global response to COVID 19 and the other a global system of volunteers, committed to sustainable living.

There are two questions this chapter seeks to answer.

- *What are the general principles of large systems design?* This chapter offers a helpful lens to assist large scale systems optimization.
- *What are the characteristics of large systems leadership?* Achieving progress among diverse, often conflicting part of a large scale network requires different skills from those running an enterprise or goal directed project with clear authorities and accountabilities.

Before addressing these two questions the following observations are pertinent.

- Identifying the key players / stakeholders, activities, and nodes of development within the associated networks or larger ecosystem, is a first step, accomplished through a helicopter view of mapping and collective learning.
- Understanding the activities and developments within the ecosystem's different networks is important. By understanding stakeholder's involvement and contributions, one can create

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<sup>1</sup> This is an extract from Andrew Olivier's new book. Andrew is Managing Partner of the Working Journey.

<sup>2</sup> An ecosystem refers to multiple networks within an umbrella of shared interests. Networks are regarded as bilateral cooperation while ecosystems are multilateral – ie will work with anyone in the ecosystem.

empowering and autonomous conditions. It is important for leadership to know what is going on rather than giving instructions.

- Large complex systems operate at different speeds and scales of complexity and thus have different design requirements.
- Activities (work) within the parts of the whole ecosystem can be grouped into Domains.
- Understanding the nature of existing or emergent Domains of activities within large complex systems (think COVID 19, UN SDGS, global emergencies) allows for recognising relevant accountabilities and authorities, information requirements and flow, empowerment and decision-making rights at all the different network levels, from local to strategic .
- Leadership of scaled, social systems is different to that of leading an accountable goal directed business, no matter its size and complexity. At scale, some of these characteristics are taken by business leadership in the Fourth Wave, which is experimenting with emergent organisational structures.
- Different tools for building collaborative leadership are required to build trust, advocacy and communication flows. Top down command and control is not optimal because of the systems complexities, its unknowns and clearly differentiated activities already existing.
- Tools which connect, engage and empower are critical. Engaging stakeholders in creating common ground, shared purposes and domains of authority and accountability is necessary, as is understanding there is no master neuron, and no one has complete authority. Leadership maturity is fundamental.
- Leveraging complimentary capacities to advance progress is essential and that is done by having clarity of vision and understanding it's all up to us.

**We call this Scaled Systems Leadership.**