EVERT BLEIJENBERG SSAARARM ORGANISATION The vital next step in organisation development



In nature, groups of more than fifty members behave like selforganizing swarms while smaller groups are being hierarchically led by alpha-leaders. Human organizations, however, are being designed to have control over far more than fifty – sometimes even thousands of people – assuming that small-group leadership principles are also applicable to large groups.

Increasingly however, hierarchically designed large organisations are loosing control, especially when the environment is changing fast such as in the case of technological developments.

In SWARM organisation, Evert Bleijenberg provides a convincing alternative for hierarchies to get control: the swarm organisation. Swarms are fully self-motivating, self-organising, self-learning and self-correcting. The author describes nature's properties of swarming and applies these properties to human organizations. 'Swarm Organisation' provides a very practical alternative for hierarchy as the main driver of control, it includes a clear methodology to capture the wisdom of the crowd, and it offers a very powerful tool: the Swarm Scan. In this book, scientifically proven insights are being made practical for managers. A must-read.

PROF. DR. BOB DE WIT, PROFESSOR OF STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP AT NYENRODE BUSINESS UNIVERSITY, AND AUTHOR OF INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLERS.

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Preface

Some people may argue that this is not purely a scientific book, and since I didn't necessarily start writing this book with the intention to make it one, they may have a point. Yet I believe it's best to leave that judgement to you, the reader. Then again, this book is not just an interesting story that I made up. It is based on more than 25 years of experience working as a management consultant, observing and interacting with people in many different organisations and on all levels. During those years I have combined my observations and interactions with logic reasoning, anticipated future trends and various psychological and empathic insights. I noticed that they revealed certain consistent patterns. These in turn led me to interesting deductions and conclusions, with the most prominent one being that most organisations today have huge problems to get themselves organised. Clearly, this is a serious issue to be dealt with.

My observations, deductions and conclusions don't necessarily follow rational explainable facts alone.

The proposed viewpoints and remedies are not based on mathematical algorithms and their outcomes are not to be expected in decimals. To appreciate and comprehend the ideas of this book to the fullest, it may be helpful to look further then just facts and figures. I encourage you to set aside the beliefs of the established order and reach within your senses. Because in this book I consider the underlying aspects of human behaviour to be more relevant and also take in account the intriguing and potentially innovative possibilities of natural organisation systems. Several hundreds of valuable books have been written by highly credible scholars about specific subjects of organisation. I have read many of these books and they have helped me build a foundation of insights. I presume that 21st century information systems will easily lead you to these books when necessary or so desired. Even if you have not read them, you should be able to follow the ideas of the Swarm Organisation. Because this book is intended to be easy to read, short and to the point. It should be accessible to anybody and I hope it will put a smile of recognition on your face every now and then. It is not my intention to go into lengthy explanations or scientific methods of proof. This book is not about proving or believing anything and I invite others to comment and add to the idea. After all, this is predominantly what the Swarm philosophy advocates.

In Part 1 of this book I intent to reveal and highlight the challenges that people and organisations will face in the 21st century. In Part 2, I will put forward suggestions on how we can improve the way we organise, with insights in the amazing ways that Nature solves problems in organisations.

The year was 1996. At the time I was the general manager of a business unit of a large high-tech company. The organisation encountered a nasty customer problem and I was asked by one of the company's VP's to investigate the issue. My team went to work and within a few weeks I reported to the VP that we found the problem, that we could solve it in 3 months and that it would probably only cost \$50,000. The response of that VP still lingers in my ears: "Evert, we've been asked to investigate the problem, not to solve it", "Go back to your team, take another 3 months, rewrite the report and leave out the part where we solve it"! The problem persisted for 2 years, 3 court cases, cost approximately \$1,2 million and 10 people lost their jobs over it. I learned that norms and values are determinative to prosperity and well-being, both in positive and negative sense, and sometimes their outcomes can be most unwelcome.

June 2019. In the newspapers I read that CEOs on average now earn 300 times more than their employees. In 1978 CEOs 'only' made 30x more. Since then, adjusted for inflation, workers have seen an 11.2% increase in compensation, while CEOs have seen a 937% increase in

earnings. Basically, CEOs earn the same in a day as an employee in a whole year. CEOs are hailed for their efforts to increase profits and stock prices, while employees are considered a cost-burden. On top of that, when things go wrong, workers are the first to be fired while

Because I passionately believe we can do better, much better.

they had no part whatsoever in the downfall. To me, there are no conceivable qualities a CEO can have to justify this enormous income difference. This ongoing inequality is just mind boggling, frustrating and utterly disturbing. It wouldn't surprise me that one day soon this may lead to a devastating revolt of the working class.

As a student in Business Administration I have been taught that human organisations have a 'hard' and 'soft' side. *Hard* being the machines, buildings and finances and *Soft* the people, the systems and processes. I have also been taught that organisations are about common goals, cooperation and growing together, but in reality, *it is the total and utter opposite.* There is no problem in changing machines or buildings. It's the people and their aversion to change that is the *Hard* part. I have concluded that human behaviour is at the core of these events and I asked myself many times: "What drives these feudal systems and why can't we do any better?" And I promised myself to:

- 1. Find a better way for people and organisations to cope with change and complexity.
- 2. Devise an organisation concept that truly serves *all stakeholders* and is more workable, agreeable and enjoyable.
- 3. Create a movement where Individuals select or create organisations that embrace the principles of this new concept.

As a semi-professional wildlife cameraman, I was in the privileged position to observe large groups of animals in the wild: *Swarms*. I quickly realised that Nature gave me a fundamental insight on how to move forward.

Evert Bleijenberg MBA

PART 1 THE 21ST CENTURY CHALLENGE

1. Introduction

funny thing happened with the crossover to the new millennium. *The world distinctively changed*. It was called the 'New Economy' and it was no longer a fashionable phrase. It was real and inescapable. Some people hailed it as the dawn of a new era. Whereas others were convinced this was just another hype, destined to disappear in the history books as just another anomaly. Now, 20 years later, even the most hard-core 'old economy' believers have to admit that the new economy has rocked this world to its core and is here to stay.

The new economy brought amazing things in many forms to many different people. Yet most of all, it brought *changes*. Unprecedented changes, that came with an ever-increasing speed and ferocity. The rapid changes forced people and organisations to significantly readjust their norms and values. People had to change their perceptions of work and private live. Clearly, not all are doing so well in adapting.

Where some businesses thrived under the new developments, many others struggled or perished. In the western world, traditional blue-collar jobs were rapidly disappearing as were the wholesale channels and small and middle-class retail entrepreneurs. Sales channels became increasingly transparent and competition suddenly could come from anywhere in the world. Traditional channels for market communication lost their meaning. They changed beyond recognition and/or disappeared altogether. Patents and intellectual property rights lost their strength. Logistics took centre stage in the fulfilment process. Access to venture capital became easier. Markets moved much quicker, demanding flexibility and instant gratification. Organisations, but also employees, started preferring flexibility, independence and decentralisation of work, over the more traditional fixed payroll jobs. The boundaries between work and private life became quite obscure. People could suddenly live, work, communicate and consume at any time and from everywhere. Furthermore, they demanded organisations to deliver community value, to be fair and accountable. Good or bad, the new economy plunged the world in a constant state of flux.

But what is causing this phenomenon? How come that organisations are in so much trouble? Is it globalisation? Modern aviation and logistics? The Internet? Or the community demands? Sure, all these items are viable enablers for the 'new economy syndrome'. But are these the defining underlying items? In my humble opinion there is another and much more determining factor to the issue, which has everything to do with the way we, humans, think and behave.

This book is about human behaviour in organisations. It addresses the questions: Why do we behave and organise the way we do? Why do we struggle to get it right? And what should we do to alleviate the trouble we are in? Organisations are groups of people, and what people believe in, is what organisations become. Consequently, people will need to change what they believe in, if they want to change the organisations they work in. This change will not require a simple process or model. It will require a paradigm shift in human behaviour.

2. What is bothering modern organisations?

You may have noticed it. The developments in human civilisation are picking up speed by the minute and this acceleration presents huge challenges to today's organisations. But why? What exactly is bothering those organisations? I believe the answer is: Increasing Change and Complexity and the problem is Big!

The growing demands of stakeholders (i.e. all customers, employees and shareholders) have changed the modern business environment and the challenges are so big that many organisations have huge problems keeping up with them. Now you may ask: "Weren't these problems always a part of running an organisation?" Well yes, they were. But over the last 45 years the direction, speed and proportion of the changes have increased exponentially. Simultaneously, globalisation tilted the 'playing field' between geopolitical regions. It created an international network of interconnected dependencies with a complexity never seen before on this planet. Organisations in general are not very keen on sharing this ongoing struggle with the outside world. But the fact is that most of them are stretched to the limit and have tremendous difficulty to adapt their products, processes and organisational structure to cope with these problems. With dire consequences.

But that's not all. From around 1950, the western world saw an increase in wealth of the middle-class. Families could comfortably live on a single income. This increased wealth in turn boosted consumption and thus the economy. Yet, this all changed around the 1980s when companies started focussing almost solely on efficiency and shareholder value. Worker compensation stalled causing the middle class to shrink at the advantage of the top 10% of shareholders. Business mechanisation and automation turned humans into machine extensions, obstructing creativity, self-organisation and self-development. But humans are sentient beings that don't respond very well to such systems. It deprives them from their individual values and cause mental illnesses. Around 2005 we saw the rise of a movement of people that demanded sensible work, with purpose and meaning. Today many young people determinedly reject working for large structured companies. Unfortunately, uneducated people often have no choice but to accept the poor working conditions and low pay. In 2016 almost 10% of the labour force in western Europe struggled with burnouts. A mental fatigue illness never heard off before in history.

Clearly, something big is going on in the last 15 years. Modern technology and globalisation probably are causing some really significant changes, but the trend already started much earlier. Allow me to share with you some examples of things which roots sprouted before the rise of modern technology and globalisation. It started in the 60s, the era of 'flower power' when people were highly motivated to create 'a better world' for all.

2.1 The consequences of creating 'a better world'

People have long since strived to make the world a better place for everyone. Equal opportunities, justice, peace, care and respect for everybody. From the middle of the 20th century people have collectively set out to create a 'a better world' for everybody, and is it working, or isn't it?

Creating a better world is not that easy. Honesty and integrity are interpretable values and not all people play by the same rules. Before Corporate Governance, businesses often were negligent and greedy, many still are! Clearly there was the need for regulations, and as a good servant, governments set out to create them by the hundreds! Organi-

3. Key realisations

ooking at all the previous observations and considerations so far, can we conclude that there are primary indicators and observations that are influencing and/or determining the future of human organisations?

3.1 Decisive subjects

Ecology is Priority 1. There are no jobs on a dead planet

There is no Earth II. For those who believe we can terra-form Mars and have a better future there, ask yourself the following question: do you truly believe mankind can create a habitable planet from scratch 400 million km away, while we can't even conserve our own perfectly habitable backyard? If you're still not convinced, then please note that it costs approximately \$5,000 to launch one bottle of wine into low earth orbit. Mankind is rapidly exceeding the thresholds of our planet's ecological resources. A catastrophe is imminent, and if we don't solve this environmental crisis very soon, reading this book will be pretty useless.

Change always is. Use it or lose it

People who say that they 'don't change' unfortunately live an illusion. Literally everything is in a constant state of flux. Change is a fact and being part of it not a choice, whether we like it or not. It is the only constant factor in this universe and there's no imaginable security or policy

5. Symptoms

In Chapter 3 I concluded that the problems that modern organisations face originate from the increasing speed of change and an even greater complexity within their operating environment. As a consequence, such organisations may not be able to act fast enough to define new products or services, or solve certain problems within the window of opportunity. They may lack the innovative capacity or required cultural inclination. Or they may not be able to get the right people in quick enough or fail to effectively communicate and connect to such people. Their legacy structure and procedures may hinder them and there is no time to reorganise to the new strategy, even if they knew what that should be!

Organisations that have difficulty with adapting to their environment exhibit certain **common symptoms**. These symptoms are almost always accompanied by a **typical behaviour** of the organisations' stakeholders. Depending on the state of an organisation, people may exhibit poor inspiration, motivation and attitude. The behavior that results from this often points to a specific symptom.

5.1 The 4 symptoms

Over the years I have learned that many problems in organisations can be brought back to just 4 common symptoms. Let's see if you recognise them.



Metaphor: Deciding which mountain to climb, why and when?

Symptom 1. The organisation struggles to set new (strategic) goals

Basically, all products or services have a limited shelf life. Which means that sooner or later the market for a product or service will be saturated or disrupted and the organisation needs to come up with something new. However, setting new goals is not only confined to coming up with new products or services. It also applies to growth strategies like opening new markets, going to the stock exchange, performing mergers and acquisitions, creating alliances, etc. In other words, organisations must make (the right) choices. Not setting (strategic) goals may jeopardise the continuity of the organisation and thus encompasses an existential threat.

This symptom often indicates that the leadership of an organisation fails to define new steps towards the future. The cause of this may lie in a rigid organisation culture or a lack of innovative capacity. People in such organisations will often state that they feel like they're stuck and are going in circles. They may appear uninspired and unconnected.

Symptom 2. The organisation struggles to organise its activities

Coming up with bright ideas is one thing. Getting them implemented is something completely different. There is no shortage of bright ideas that looked great on paper, but never made it into the real world. Some-

PART 2 THE ROAD TO SWARM ORGANISATION

In part two of this book I will talk about the direction I believe we need to take, to alleviate the problems that organisations face today and increasingly in the future. I will explain where this direction comes from, why it will work, how it all fits together and where it will lead us. Please join me on 'the road to Swarm Organisation'. Knowledge and experience come from the past, so it's safe and proven. It's also out of date!

8. It's all about behaviour

ontrary to what many organisation professionals still believe, success is not really so much about knowledge, skill or experience! Your organisation may have the most brilliant plans, the brightest ideas, the best people and the smartest processes, but all of that really doesn't matter if you don't actually DO something with it. Even more important, if you don't put your ideas, plans and processes out in the real world, you will never know if they were truly brilliant or just another 'brain fart'. And even if your ideas are truly great and you bring them out in the world, then still it may fail if you don't exhibit the right behaviour necessary to be successful. There is no shortage in examples of great ideas that failed just because of that. Our behaviour is essential for everything we do.

8.1 What is behaviour and where does it originate from

Behaviour can be considered as the physical representation of an entities' norms, values and believe systems. It shows us its internal reflections of *inspiration, motivation and attitude*. Behaviour is basically a form of communication, that tells us how an entity perceives the world around

it and how it relates to that world. Behaviour is the first and only property of a person, a unit or an organisation, that qualifies its existence. It is the holographic projection of the self, its public relations benchmark. It is the cover by which we judge the book.

Behaviour is the physical representation of an entities' invisible inner reflections and believe systems. Who, what and where you are now, is not by accident. It is no more or less than the residual outcome of all your decisions and actions till today.

But in our modern society it is a strong taboo to 'judge a book by its cover', and that in general, is a good norm. Because we all know that what people show us from the outside, not always is what they truly are on the inside. Modern society has made well-conditioned and experienced chameleons out of us.

Yet through all the smoke and mirrors, a part of the underlying character always shows. Those apparently insignificant behavioural signs, tell us a lot about the underlying norms and values. Such norms and values are created by all experiences and conditioning that an individual (or organisation) received in its lifetime and they a have huge influence on someone's behaviour. For example: we may believe that cigarettes, alcohol and drugs are addictive, but the true addiction is in the

9. Swarm Behaviour: Nature works holographic

T believe people should do so too!

It is my conviction that humans are not the great inventors and problem solvers that they believe themselves to be. We may think we are smart because we can fly planes, build computers and split atoms, but allow me to point out to you that birds, insects and bats also fly. Even the dinosaurs flew and they already did so more than 165 million years ago. Until today we have yet to build a computer that matches the awesome cognitive powers of the human brain and the Sun has been splitting and fusing atoms for more than 4.6 billion years. Needless to say that all of this took place without any help from us, humans. It may be a little bit humbling, but the whole idea that great inventions, solutions or systems can only be conceived by 'intellectual humans', is absolute and utter nonsense. At best, we're just smart copy cats.

Nature has already come up with much better answers to much bigger problems, and it did so a heck of a lot sooner than we did. So why wouldn't we accept that Nature already has a *much better way to organise things too*? The birds taught us how to fly, so why won't we let Nature teach us how to organise. I want you to consider the following.

9.1 Why do animals swarm?

It doesn't really matter whether you are a mighty bald eagle, a beautiful daffodil or a slimy jelly fish. Whether you live in the highest mountains,

Mother Nature already has all the answers and talks to us all the time. She only doesn't speak English.

the bottom of the ocean or a garbage dump. Or whether you live solitary under a rock, in a family group or in a majestic herd. All living organisms on planet Earth follow the same three basic rules, being:

- 1. Make sure you eat (live)
- 2. Make sure you don't get eaten (don't get killed)
- 3. Make sure you reproduce (thrive, grow)

And yes, however sophisticated and detached from Nature we think we are, that includes us, human beings. Nature is extremely versatile, yet at its core it likes to keep things simple, generic and applicable to everything. *The basic rule of three fits that description!*

So what is the story with swarming? Nature divides organisation forms basically in two types. Those with hierarchic behaviour and those with swarm behaviour. Hierarchic groups or packs, usually consist of a single alpha individual that can be both male or female. Such groups are formed in both predatory or prey type animals, but they all have a strict

10.1 How to create a 'Human Swarm'?

It is my conviction that swarm behaviour is a viable option for solving the problems that modern organisations face now and in the future. Yet, how to create such organisations and make sure humans accept it? Because humans are distinctively different from animals, and simply implementing the 6 basic swarm principles probably will not get the acceptance we need to make it successful.

An example

Let's assume that we decide to *just implement the swarm principles today*. Meaning: as of now abandon all hierarchy, fire your management team, self-organise, make your communication redundant, be adaptive, innovative, etc. Right! It doesn't take much imagination to foresee the (very

entertaining) chaos and minor catastrophe this would create. What do you think would happen to highly structured organisations like airlines or the postal services? I think I wouldn't dare to come near the airport the day that that happens.

Not only would this cause many unhappy customers, employees probably would be quite I am using the same brand of toothpaste for more than 30 years. How about you? People don't like change!

upset too, because most people are not that happy with big changes. Certainly not if they happen very fast. You only have to think about the culture shock that this would create. People would be totally lost and probably invent new organisation dogmas on the spot, and that is exactly the opposite of the objective.

Addressing human properties

I realised that if I wanted to create an organisation based on swarm behaviour, and if I wanted that organisation model to be easily accepted by humans, I had to incorporate the elements that make up generic



- Adaptive Culture Capacity
- Innovative Capacity
- Connective Capacity

The containers are highly interconnected and interdependent. They overlap and intersect, and together identify where inspiration, motivation and attitude converge into a certain behaviour, with both internal and external significance.

It looked as if I was on the right track, but there were two more issues to resolve: 1) I needed to find out if I could combine human and swarm behaviour elements in a logical and beneficial way into the containers, and 2) I had to find out if it was possible to use those elements to measure the 'state' of an organisation and relate that to the 4 symptoms I had seen so many times. The challenge wasn't over yet.

Container	Elements
Adaptive Culture Capacity (Adaptiveness)	 Reflect on Own Culture Mirror and Match (Self) Organisation (Self) Motivation
Innovative Capacity (Creativeness)	 Value Proposition Role-based Organisation Design Simultaneous Generalism and Specialism Ideas and Roadmap
Connective Capacity (Relatability)	 Sharing Information and Knowledge Redundant Connectivity Empathic Focus Supportive Feedback

Table: Container and Elements

To make new ideas more comprehensible, it often helps to create a graphical representation of the concept. This is why I developed The Swarm Scan. First and foremost this graphic is a way to explain, and visually grasp how the different parts fit together and interact. It may take some instruction, but once you have studied it in more detail together with the definitions from chapter 10.3, it will become clearer.

The Swarm Scan

This graphic is also part of the Swarm Scan, an application that measures the varies values and plots a visual representation thereof. With this graphic, organisations can instantly see what their dominant behaviour is and what the potential focus areas for improvement might be. In Chapter 10.4 I will tell you more about the Swarm Scan.

But what exactly do these containers and elements mean? Why do they fit together, and how and why are they supposed to solve the issues of organisations? Fair questions! In the next chapters I will go to the heart of the matter, but before I start talking about the containers and elements that make up the swarm solution, some words about how I suggest you approach it.



The SWARM scan

As said in the preface, this book is based on more than 25 years of experience working as a management consultant, observing and interacting with people in many different organisations and on all levels. The swarm solution is a highly interesting concept that transcends logic only. I request you try to see more than the logic alone. Allow yourself to listen to what your inner senses tell you about what you read. Then ask yourself: "Does this feel right?"



10.4 Connective Capacity

To what extent are people or organisations capable of creating meaningful and rewarding relationships?

I'm sure we all have had this experience in our lives. Maybe it was during a discussion with a good friend, or maybe when you tried to convince a customer of the unique benefits of your product. Despite all your best efforts and good intentions, the response of your counterpart was: *"It sounds really good, but it doesn't feel right."* Have you ever asked yourself what that meant?

The reason why people do or do not 'buy into your story' is almost entirely biological. Yes, you have heard that right: biological. It is because of how our brains are built and function. The outer layer and latest addition to the human brain, the neocortex, is the area of the brain responsible for cognitive reasoning and language. Underneath that lies the much older limbic lobe. where most of our emotional, motivational and behaviour functions reside. It's responsible for our convictions and inner decisions and *it's totally incapable of logic or language*! Do you follow this? Basically what this means is that whatever amazing story, arguments or rational thinking you may present to a person or group of people, that doesn't mean anything to the brain part that makes the emotional decisions. Behaviour that creates meaningful and rewarding relationships requires us to communicate in a way and on a level that appeals to human feelings.

Connective capacity is about *Relatability* or per definition, *the quality you have to understand, be understood, connect with and be connected with.* Connective capacity is about rapport building, knowing the why of the what of a person, sharing, supporting and trusting. It constitutes a deeper level of communication and it is independent from content or context. Connective capacity is an imperative quality for success, because it doesn't matter how good your products or services are. If you can't connect to others, they will not be convinced about what you have to say, let alone, sell.

It is more likely you buy something you don't need from someone you like, then something you do need from someone you don't.

What elements make up connective capacity?

Sharing Information and Knowledge

This is about the FREEDOM and WILLINGNESS to share INFORMA-TION and KNOWLEDGE.

With the invention of the smartphone and social media, mankind entered the era of the sharing society. Today little can be hidden from others and within organisations information is much more accessible. Still some people believe that withholding information provides them with a competitive advantage. With so much knowledge available online, this seems nearly irrelevant. However, what <u>is</u> relevant, is that it creates mistrust and retraction, and it limits organisations inspirational capacity. In swarms all information is shared, real time and uncensored. This increases an overall knowledge, awareness and creative insights.

But there is more to this. Sharing knowledge and information combined with the element of Redundant Connectivity, creates a phenomenon called *Swarm Intelligence*. The simple logic that 1,000 people know more than just a few, means that better decisions will be made. An organisation that operates like this, much resembles the amazing information processing of a brain. For organisations that believe that secrecy is an unavoidable necessity, please note that people will always talk, whether they have the accurate information or not, and what they don't



know they will gladly make up and add to the story. It's called fiction. What do you prefer?

The easiest step in improving information and knowledge sharing is to make it a policy to do so, or at least encourage all stakeholders to share as much as possible within the law. This puts stakeholders in a constant learning state, which will increase swarm intelligence. However, the most important factor is to convince and

Do you want to make your organisation

- More adaptive, intelligent, efficient and innovative?
- One that improves stakeholder equality, ecological footprint, social justice and -impact?
- So that people are more motivated, energetic, empathic and enjoy their work?
- > Self-starting, self-motivating, self-learning and self-correcting?

Than you need to read this book now!

In the last 25 years the rate of change and complexity in our world has increased to the point where traditional, hierarchal organisations no longer function. As a result, many fail to create value for their stakeholders and experience an increase in stakeholder inequality and social and ecological mismatches. A new and future proof organisation model is desperately needed. The Swarm Organisation model is designed to address this challenge.

Swarm Organisation provides a very practical alternative for hierarchy as the main driver of control, it includes a clear methodology to capture the wisdom of the crowd, and it offers a very powerful tool: the Swarm Scan. In this book, scientifically proven insights are being made practical for managers. A must-read.

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Evert Bleijenberg MBA

Author, Founder, Strategist & Keynote Speaker Pleasantly unconventional, authentic and with many intriguing stories. The man that connected the dots and came up with this remarkable new organisation concept.



