

Book Summary

IT'S A STARFISH WORLD AND MOST PEOPLE DON'T EVEN REALIZE IT

One thing that business, institutions, governments and key individuals will have to realize is spiders and starfish may look alike, but starfish have a miraculous quality to them. Cut off the leg of a spider, and you have a seven-legged creature on your hands; cut off its head and you have a dead spider. But cut off the arm of a starfish and it will grow a new one. Not only that, but the severed arm can grow an entirely new body. Starfish can achieve this feat because, unlike spiders, they are decentralized; every major organ is replicated across each arm.

But starfish don't just exist in the animal kingdom. Starfish organizations are taking society and the business world by storm, and are changing the rules of strategy and competition. Like starfish in the sea, starfish organizations are organized on very different principles than we are used to seeing in traditional organizations. Spider organizations are centralized and have clear organs and structure. You know who is in charge. You see them coming.

Starfish organizations, on the other hand, are based on completely different principles. They tend to organize around a shared ideology or a simple platform for communication- around ideologies like *al Qaeda* or Alcoholics Anonymous. They arise rapidly around the simplest ideas or platforms. Ideas or platforms that can be easily duplicated. Once they arrive they can be massively disruptive and are here to stay, for good or bad. And the Internet can help them flourish.

So in today's world starfish are starting to gain the upper hand.

How can Toyota leverage starfish principles to crush their spider-like rivals, GM and Ford? How did tiny Napster cripple the global music industry? Why is free, community-based Wikipedia crushing Encyclopedia Britannica overnight? Why is tiny Craigslist crippling the global newspaper industry? Why is *Al Qaeda* flourishing and even growing stronger? In today's world to answer this it is essential to understand the potential strength of a starfish organization.

The Starfish and the Spider by [Ori Brafman and Rod A. Beckstrom](#), explores the phenomenal and unstoppable new power of the starfish organizations and will change the way you look at the world.

Book Jacket Summary

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? After five years of ground-breaking research Ori Brafman and Rod Beckstrom have discovered some unexpected answers, gripping stories, and a tapestry of unlikely connections. *The Starfish and the Spider* argues that organizations fall into two categories: traditional 'spiders,' which have a rigid hierarchy and top-down leadership, and revolutionary 'starfish,' which rely on the power of peer relationships.

The Starfish and the Spider explores what happens when starfish take on spiders (such as the music industry vs. Napster, Kazaa, and the P2P services that followed). It reveals how established companies and institutions, from IBM to Intuit to the US government, are also learning how to incorporate starfish principles to achieve success. And it will teach you:

- How the Apaches evaded the powerful Spanish army for 200 years
- The power of a simple circle
- The importance of catalysts who have an uncanny ability to bring people together.
- How the Internet has become a breeding ground for leaderless organizations
- How Alcoholics Anonymous has reached TK million members with only a shared ideology and without a leader

The Starfish and the Spider is the rare book that will change how you understand the world around you. You'll never see things the same way again.

Impetus for Writing

After the events of 9/11, we co-founded Global Peace Networks, a non-profit that engaged CEOs from around the world in conflict resolution and economic development projects. Small circles of CEOs worked in the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Africa. There was no hierarchy or rigid structure. Rather, the circles worked independently on their own projects. Over time, we began seeing connections between this decentralized network and what was happening in virtually every industry.

The connections all around us were just too strong to ignore--what did craigslist have in common with al Qaeda? How were Skype and the Apache Nation linked? What did Toyota, GE, and eBay have in common?

In May of 2004, we presented our ideas to a group of 60 CEOs at the Stanford Graduate School of Business. The group loved the presentation and asked for more. They told us we had to write the book.

The Title

Our initial working title was "The Decentralized Revolution." We still love this title but it was just too abstract, not to mention a mouthful. "The Starfish and The Spider" on the other hand, is concrete, has meaning, and is easy to remember. The concept of using the starfish as an image for representing decentralized networks came from brilliant environmental scientist, Dr. Jane Lubchenco. We were having dinner with her and told her about our work and ideas. She encouraged us to study the starfish which has a completely decentralized nervous system.

The Starfish is a perfect metaphor for decentralized organizations. The spider, in turn, sort of looks like a starfish--it has a bunch of legs coming out from a centralized body. But the spider has a head--it's centralized. The contrast between these two animals is the basis for the title.

"The Starfish and the Spider is a compelling and important book."
—PIERRE OMIKYAR, CEO, Omidyar Network; founder and chairman, eBay Inc.

THE
STARFISH
AND THE SPIDER



**THE UNSTOPPABLE POWER OF
LEADERLESS ORGANIZATIONS**

ORI BRAFMAN and ROD A. BECKSTROM