



## a simpler way

Margaret J. Wheatley and Myron Kellner-Rogers  
from the author of *Leadership and the New Science*

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**A Simpler Way** Margaret J. Wheatley , Myron Kellner-Rogers

Constructed around five major themes -- play, organization, self, emergence, and coherence -- A Simpler Way challenges the way we live and work, presenting a profound worldview. In thoughtful, creative prose, the authors help readers connect their own personal experiences to the idea that organizations are evolving systems. With its relaxed, poetic style, A Simpler Way will help readers increase their organizing capacity and free them from the daily stress that disorganization brings.

## A Simpler Way Details

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## From Reader Review A Simpler Way for online ebook

### Dave says

Vague, abstract, slightly frustrating, and comforting in its hopeful point of view. Life is playful, self-referential, messy, self-organizing, and a mutually co-dependent dance of exploration. Recommended for C. Alexander fans, systems folks, Caprof disciples, poets, ponderers, wanderers, the org.-minded, and anyone who's got the funny feeling that things just aren't right.

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### Moutasem Algharati says

A very provocative read that challenges many of the leadership paradigms of the 20th century. The primary goal of this book is to examine how we can make life less arduous and more delightful. Margaret Wheatley and Myron Kellner-Rogers challenge us to think differently about how to organize human activities. To me, the essence of the idea is that life tends to self-organize. Networks, patterns, and structures naturally emerge without external imposition or direction. The hypothesis is that "organization" wants to happen naturally in a way where things can get done and people can be at their best. I guarantee this book will challenge your thinking. I also guarantee that it will enlighten your thinking, as well.

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### Laurie says

A Simpler Way by Margaret Wheatley & Myron Kellner Rogers.

Systems organize themselves. A breakthrough book for me. Prose and illustrations are beautiful - like an art book.

"Constructed around five major themes -- play, organization, self, emergence, and coherence -- A Simpler Way challenges the way we live and work, presenting a profound worldview.

In thoughtful, creative prose, the authors help readers connect their own personal experiences to the idea that organizations are evolving systems. With its relaxed, poetic style, A Simpler Way will help readers increase their organizing capacity and free them from the daily stress that disorganization brings."

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### Keith Swenson says

I kinda loved it, I kinda hated it. If you have read it, you know what I mean. It is tough to review.

One of the reviews here compared it to those motivational posters. The book kind of has that feel, starting with 16 pages of grainy black and white full page photos. It is set in a sans-serif font with plenty of white space on the pages. The 10x10 format makes it feel more like a coffee table book than a book on organizations. However all this sells the book short.

What I liked about the book is the "take no prisoners" approach to battling the "scientific management"

mindset. Business schools, management experts, efficiency experts all traditionally take us down the course of "plan before you do" and particularly that the more you plan, the better it is to be. The ultimate in the scientific mindset is that if business activity can be defined into detailed sub-minute tasks which are then flawlessly performed by workers that this will lead to the perfect organization. The factory office.

"a simpler way" rejects scientific management from the start saying that you should organize around play, organizing, self, or coherence. It sounds at first like some new-age spiritual guide talking about life, and how life evolves and succeeds and is resilient against all eventualities. How nature is both profligate in abundance of forms, and yet merciless about elimination of waste. Life is personified as "being attracted to order" and yet at the same time "using messes" to achieve it.

One quote I liked: There is no such thing as survival of the fittest, only survival of the fit. This means that there is no answer that is right, but many answers that might work.

The implications is that an organization based on these principles will thrive by leveraging the collective intelligence of the members of the organization. Such an organization will allow creativity and imagination to thrive to find unique adaptive solutions to problems as they are faced, and will not be locked into a centrally dictated and increasingly outdated plan that was drawn up separately from the organization. There are plenty of references from philosophers and sociology studies to back these points of view: Sagan, Maturana & Varela, Darwin, Gould, Prigogine, Shopenhauer, and many more.

What you will NOT find is a plan on how to construct such an organization. There is no cookbook recipe to achieve this. How could there be, after all, a centralize plan for a decentralized behavior? The book instead speaks to your intuition about how organizations really work, less because of the structure placed on them, and more in spite of it.

Who should read this? Tough question. If you are leading (or advising the leader) of an organization that survives on creativity, then it is possible that you will find some support to lend confidence in an approach that allows for a messier organization. That may be faint praise. Who wants a messier organization? This is put forward as a way to battle complexity, and to provide for resilience, in the face of unpredictable future courses. It exudes a kind of wisdom that a mature manager will probably be able to make use of. But don't expect any formulae.

If I were to try, I could probably pick a lot of holes in the material presented, but that is not the point of the book. Instead it is a book to make you think. And I believe it achieves this.

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## **Cassandra Was Right says**

Inane but harmless

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## **beth says**

Meg Wheatley brings a unique perspective, blending science and philosophy as a way of looking at people and organizations. The premise is truly that nature self organizes, we as people do not need to "control" things like we sometimes think we need to, people, nature, the world will self-organize, with or without our

"help".

Easy read that makes me reconsider my beliefs and actions.

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### **Jeremy says**

This book takes the often challenging language and concepts used to explain human systems theory and turns it into poetry. A simpler way can be read on different levels. I have found it to be spiritually evocative, others may read it as an essay on occupational development, while others may experience it for its beautiful layout, including the composition of the photographs. I wish more books on complex subjects could be this interesting to look at and take in.

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### **kates says**

1. I love Meg Wheatley. I want to apprentice with her.
2. I started this on the airplane between Albany, NY and Chicago. I was flying for business.
3. I marveled at another passenger through the flight: his EMS socks, his Cornell inbox, his big flannel shirt and his boyishly handsome face. He was traveling with his beautiful, dark-haired wife in Brooks sneakers and their two young children. It was the Monday before Thanksgiving, and they were connecting in Chicago to somewhere distant. They represented a certain upstate New York sensibility; the white history of the land more accessible to me than the history of the land where I come from. I read his email over his shoulder. The messages were about approving bids for development and planting birch trees for sugaring. As I read my book and his email, I couldn't ignore the deep knowing that my life is reflecting the choices that I have made back to me.

My life is reflecting the choices.

I felt empowered, you could say.

4. My greatest takeaway from this book is a reminder that all life wants to live and that our deeply held cultural assumptions about change and adaptation are sensible only in a machinistic society. So just a little something there.

5. Resonance:

"A system needs access to itself. It needs to understand who it is, where it is, what it believes, what it knows. These needs are nourished by information. Information is one of the primary conditions that spawns the organizations we see. If it moves through a system freely, individuals learn and change and their discoveries can be integrated by the system. the system becomes both resilient and flexible. But if information is restricted, held tightly in certain regions, the system can neither learn nor respond.

No one knows what information an individual will chose to notice. This is why structuring, gatekeeping, and censoring threaten people's ability to discover something new. They also threaten the vitality and stability of the entire system.

When we shrink people's access to information, we shrink their capacity."

6. More resonance:

"After so many years of defending ourselves against life and searching for better controls, we sit exhausted in the unyielding structures of organization we've created, wondering what happened. What happened to effectiveness, to creativity, to meaning? What happened to us? Trying to get these structures to change becomes the challenge of our lives. We draw their futures and design them into clearly better forms. We push them, we prod them. We try fear, we try enticement. We collect tools, we study techniques. We use everything we know and end up nowhere. What happened?"

Yet it is only our worldview that dooms us to this incompetence. This world that we seek to control so carefully is a world we have created."

7. And finally:

"The only antidote to the unnerving effects of such incoherence is integrity. People and organizations with integrity are wholly themselves. No aspect of self stands different or apart. At their center is clarity, not conflict. When they go inside to find themselves, there is only one self there."

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### **John Stepper says**

I came across this book from the notes in (the excellent) "Reinventing Organizations." And I can see the impact of the thinking in "A Simpler Way" as the authors capture the limits of our model of organizations:

"When we view organizations as machine-like objects, unavoidably they become complexities of structure, policy, and roles. We build rigid structures incapable of responding. We box ourselves in behind hard boundaries breached only by hostile forays. We create places of fear. We shrink from one another. We mistrust the elemental organizing forces of life. The struggle and competitiveness that we thought characterized life become the preeminent features of our organizations."

The book whets your appetite for wanting to do things differently without giving you much indication of what that might be except for allusions to self-organization and the like. Perhaps, in 1997 when "A Simple Way" was published, the observation of what was wrong was enough. Now I feel we're ready to take steps and actually do things differently.

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### **Chris Nelson says**

Love this book! An easy read, that emerges in form as it talks about how everything emerges and finds and refines its own systems. "Simple, as a flower, and that's a complicated thing."

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### **Janet says**

I was introduced to Margaret Wheatley through this book as a part of a graduate course on Leadership and Organizational behavior, taught by a former priest turned organizational development HR specialist. The course was life changing in how I viewed business, systems, teams, etc. It led, along with many concurrent

life changes, started me on a course of discovery on how to truly create a company that was a place where it was truly win-win-win.

Wheatley is on the bleeding edge of thought leaders about what could be, I suspect it will take us decades due to the sociological changes that will need to take place for these ideals to breath in many places. Wheatley does not run a company and advises. I find, like many OD practitioners, there is a gap of understanding about the sociological realities of change since people in the 20th century were taught to build systems and now we are all learning to allow knowledge workers to build their own approaches.

Her ideals, for me, are thought provoking and do allow me to explore beliefs and see if they fit for the future.

Here's a sample of wheatleys's take on the importance of relationships.

<http://www.margaretwheatley.com/article/relationships-as-a-way-of-being>

The book itself is more like poetry, so I don't recommend it for non-fiction readers.

The book is based around the following ideas: everything is in a constant process of discovery and creating; life uses mess to get to well-ordered solutions, it doesn't seem to share our desires for efficiency or neatness, it uses redundancy, fuzziness, dense webs of relationships, and unending trails and errors to find what works; life is intent on finding what works, not what's "right"; life creates more possibilities as it engages with opportunities; life is attracted to order; life organizes around identity; everything participates in the creation and evolution of its neighbors.

The book "The Wisdom of Crowds" discovered to take advantage of the wisdom of a crowd, a certain framework needed to be in place to make the reality possible. Wheatley, idealistic that she is, does not yet recognize that piece of the puzzle. I appreciate her idealism and thoughts, just find on the implementation level, we have a generation to go.

Here is the quote from this book:

"In their work on human cognition, Maturana and Varela explain that, at any moment, what we see is most influenced by who we have decided to be. Our eyes do not simply pick up information from an outside world and relay it to our brains. Information relayed from the outside through the eye accounts for only 20 percent of what we use to create a perception. At least 80 percent of the information that the brain works with is information already in the brain.

We each create our own worlds by what we choose to notice, creating a world of distinctions that makes sense to us. We then "see" the world through this self we have created. Information from the external world is a minor influence. We connect who we are with selected amounts of new information to enact our particular version of reality.

Because information from the outside plays such a small role in our perceptions, Maturana and Varela note something quite important for our activities with one another. We can never direct a living system. We can only disturb it. As external agents we provide only small impulses of information. We can nudge, titillate, or provoke one another into some new ways of seeing. But we can never give anyone an instruction and expect him or her to follow it precisely. We can never assume that anyone else sees the world as we do.

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### **Sabrina says**

I put this book on hold and read it because it was suggested in a class or group I attended. I hoped that reading it would remind me why I wanted to read it and where the suggestion came from but I could not figure it out.

Anyway, I felt this book said nothing with all its words. There was no point to it. I always found it redundant. I think these authors were very good at writing school papers where you said the same thing and nothing at all over and over to meet word or page requirements.

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### **Curtis Penner says**

Uninspiring. Writes how chaos leads to discovery. How out of a mess great things happen. How "A" attracts more "A".

She really should learn about entropy. She should learn that a mess is inefficient. Agility is about not having the burden of organizational rigidity.

So much of the book was repeated babble, saying you can be great and overcome. Then you show up to work and have the same problems that need to be solved now. You have management that is in place to protect them or customers who don't care how you work, just what you produce.

In the end, what she writes about is feel good. I believe that goal should exist and be broken down into subgoals and that all goals are mutable.

I have read this book twice and came to the same conclusion.

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### **Ron Quartel says**

Self-organization and emergence trump command and control. That is the simple way that has worked for nature since the dawn of time. Don't fight it.

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### **Geert Hofman says**

This is a beautifully written (and illustrated) inspirational book that tells a great story about the nature of things and management/leadership in organizations. It focuses on playfulness in contradiction to manipulation and controlling. It shows or rather evokes the worth of searching the right wave in opposition to wanting to plough against the currents.

Life wants to happen. Organization wants to be. Just follow their lead and everything becomes easier. Good advice but the book loses a star because it doesn't really tell you how you go about realizing this goal. You

could of course say: just do it! But that doesn't really help. Absolutely worth the read anyhow.

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