



## UN 2.0 AND THE SCIENCE OF EFFECTIVE ORGANISATIONS

DR KENNETH M. STOKES & DR F. CRAIG CONLEY

UN 2.0 seeks to articulate the Secretary-General Guterres's vision "of a modern United Nations system, rejuvenated by a forward-thinking culture, and empowered by cutting-edge skills fit for the twenty-first century."



The policy brief UN 2.0 [N1] appears to embrace some aspects a systemic approach to addressing global challenges. UN 2.0's strategies, while innovative in their approach to addressing global challenges, reveal some critical gaps when viewed from the perspective of the science of effective organisation - gaps that if not addressed, will, except by accident, end in failure. Let me offer a highly abbreviated summary. [N2]

**Operational Closure and Autonomy:** UN 2.0 emphasizes open collaboration and data sharing across borders and sectors. While this is a worthy goal, it could conflict with the cybernetic principle of operational closure, where a system maintains a degree of autonomy to manage its environment and ensure viability. The open, interconnected nature of UN 2.0 could lead to vulnerabilities where external influences unduly affect decision-making processes, diluting the system's autonomy and viability.

**Recursive Structures:** The science of effective organisation has demonstrated that viable organisations must contain viable systems within themselves, creating a nested or recursive structure. This is essential for managing growing complexity and maintaining viability at various levels. organisations that operate at a multitude of levels must have organisational systems that are operationally viable at each of those levels. UN 2.0's framework, focused heavily on global collaboration, might overlook the importance of strengthening internal recursive units (like national, sub-regional or regional offices) that can operate independently yet cohesively within the larger UN structure. One might recall the concept of subsidiarity at the core of reforms advocated by former UN Sec-Gen Boutros Boutros-Ghali. UN 2.0's strategies should include explicit plans for maintaining viability, especially under unforeseen global shifts, ensuring the organisation remains effective and relevant.

**Complexity Management:** Ontologically constrained, UN 2.0 seeks to manage complexity by leveraging technology, innovation, and foresight. Its approach appears to lack specific mechanisms and an overarching framework of diagnosing organisational dysfunction and policy mechanisms to correct those dysfunctions when they occur. Embracing a systems ontology, an organisational cybernetic approach would advocate specific structures and diagnostic framework that can manage unknown unknowns through recursive, self-organising systems. UN 2.0's approach does sufficiently address how these diverse inputs are integrated and synthesized to form coherent policies and actions.

**Feedback Systems:** - Effective organisations rely on robust feedback mechanisms to continuously adjust and improve based on environmental changes. UN 2.0's emphasis on data and innovation suggests a possible move towards this, but it is not clear how feedback from these new technologies and initiatives will be systematically captured, interpreted, and used to adjust strategies requisite to the complex dynamic. There might be a need for clearer mechanisms to ensure that feedback influences strategic decisions and operational adjustments.

**Adaptability and Learning:** - While UN 2.0 refers to learning and adaptation, from the perspective of the science of effective organisation a more explicit framework for how learning occurs within the system is needed. Organisational learning is not only about adopting new technologies or strategies but importantly about evolving the governance models of the organisation, its structure and processes based on continuous feedback and environmental scanning.

In summary, while UN 2.0 is ambitious in leveraging different approaches to address global challenges, from the perspective of the systems science of effective organisation, it could substantially benefit from an integrated structure regarding autonomy, recursive organisational units, complexity management, feedback loops, and organisational learning. Integrating these cybernetic principles more explicitly could substantially enhance UN 2.0's ability to guide organisational design and create viable, adaptive and effective organisational structures and processes for addressing global challenges including multilateralism and UN Security Council reform.

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Notes:

1 Our Common Agenda. Policy Brief II. UN 2.0 (September 2023). [https://www.un.org/two-zero/sites/default/files/2023-09/un-2.0\\_policy-brief\\_en.pdf](https://www.un.org/two-zero/sites/default/files/2023-09/un-2.0_policy-brief_en.pdf)

2 With a variety of use cases, there is a very substantial literature that highlights the contribution of the science of effective organisation. Works by Russell Ackoff, Stafford Beer, Peter Checkland, Raul Espejo, Angela Espinosa, Allenna Leonard, Jose, Perez Rios, Markus Schwaninger, Kenneth Stokes, Heinz von Foerster, Geoffrey Vickers, etc. are particularly relevant to the effective design for UN 2.0

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Corresponding author:

Kenneth Stokes, PhD  
President & CEO  
World Sustainability Forum  
Madrid, Rome, Santa Fe

F. Craig Conley, PhD  
Senior Research Fellow  
World Sustainability Forum  
Madrid, Rome, Santa Fe

Tel: +1 919.273.6912 (WhatsApp)  
Skype: kenneth.m.stokes  
E-mail: [kmstokes@worldsforum.org](mailto:kmstokes@worldsforum.org)  
Web: <https://www.worldsforum.org>

E-mail: [C.Conley@worldsforum.org](mailto:C.Conley@worldsforum.org)  
Web: <https://www.worldsforum.org>