

# Editor's Note (3.1)

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With this first issue of *Emergence* in our third year, we return to a discussion long heard in complexity science circles and at complexity conferences: "What is complexity science?" Our guest editors, Kurt Richardson and Paul Cilliers, have gathered prospective answers to this question from a wide variety of "gurus" in the field. Peter Allen kicks off the discussion with observations about knowledge and Matthew Abraham ends it with observations about ethics. In between, a list of authors including Will Medd, David Byrne, Ray Cooksey, Göktu? Morçöl, Steven Phelan, Bill McKelvey, John Luhman, and David Boje provide a diverse range of insights, explorations, and, yes, more questions.

While before reading this issue you might ask "Who are these people?" and "Why are they gurus?", the answers will be readily apparent from their contributions herein.

What complexity science needs less of is yet another trade book extolling the virtues of a supposedly complexity-based view of management, be it of companies, of society, or of social policy. These works have had their day in the sun and have done much to promote complexity research in the eyes of the media and the public. But, science is not made on the basis of trade books and popular fads. There is much real work being done, and much real work to do.

Complexity has been in the news due to developments in the economy and in medicine. Consider this quote from a recent issue of *The Industry Standard* (a new-economy publication):

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*But there is something more profound happening, as well. The current economic downturn came out of nowhere, and it caught even the most farsighted companies by surprise. There were many signs that the great economic boom of the 1990s was not going to continue forever, but the fact remains that hardly anyone—from Fed Chairman Alan Greenspan on down—saw what was coming, and thus no one took the steps that might have made the downturn less painful. Some of this may have been the result of collective hallucination, an irrational belief that "things are different this time." But mostly, it reflects our continued inability to make much sense of macroeconomic forces. With the amount of brainpower and computing power now devoted to the subject, one would expect that we'd be getting a better handle on it every day. Instead, the ever-growing complexity of the global economy, and the increasing speed with which its forces interact, seems to leave us further behind.*

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If complexity science is to gain in stature, this notion of being left further behind must be replaced with advances in understanding.

In relation to healthcare, for example, the US National Institute of Medicine recently released a report, "Crossing the Quality Chasm," which states that medical errors are symptoms of a dysfunctional system. It identifies ten simple rules that currently govern interactions between providers and patients at the micro-system level (a nursing unit or physician's practice). The report proposes a broad overhaul founded on bottom-up, evolutionary change based on lessons gained from complexity science.

*Emergence* has its part to play in these ongoing developments. Collections of articles such as in this issue represent but one tool in the advancement of the thinking and the debate. There are no one-minute manager recipes in these articles. And, in truth, there are probably no one-minute manager recipes in complexity science. But, there is a fair amount of meaty material in both.

I welcome you to our third year with pleasure—read on.