

Adjacent opportunities (11.1)

Engaged emergence—Getting beyond enterprise fortune telling

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Cause, condition, and effect characterize the process of emergence, but often times, rather than focusing on this, enterprises would rather spend billions trying to predict and divine what is going to happen in the future. How effective has this fortune telling been? The answer is costly and not very accurate. However, that fact hasn't seemed to stop anyone from investing more resources into enterprise soothsayers as a means of getting a leg up, no matter how inaccurate they prove to be.

If enterprises better understood what drives and influences business action, they might be a bit more successful in their prognostication by narrowing their sooth and recognizing the cues, as my colleague Michael Lissack would call them, that present themselves to those who, in fact can, see them as cues. This ability is what I am calling *Engaged Emergence*.

Engaged Emergence is attending to the resonance of the world, of which we are a part, and being authentically present to witness the auspicious coincidence of what emerges. In some cultures, this is also called mindfulness, our ability to focus our minds without distraction on what presents itself. The opposite of mindfulness is mindfilledness, a quality that is in constant distraction, and by its nature, will miss any but the most blatant cues that become present. The process begins with theory.

The Theory of Enterprise Action is based primarily on two core ingredients; 1) What we want—that which informs all our products and services, and can then be referred to as information, and 2) What we build to support getting what we want, or infrastructure. When the ratio between information and infrastructure is right, according to the given situation of the enterprise, the action takes place, successfully. When the ratio is not correct, and there is too much or too little infrastructure to support the acquisition of information, we do not get a successful action. Ah, if it were as simple as just that. Unfortunately, the actions we take in our enterprises are also influenced by two other forces: 1) The culture of the enterprise — a culture of fear automatically creates greater infrastructure to protect oneself from what is feared. A culture that is too loosey-goosey creates action that is too unbounded so that no organization, self or otherwise, can take place, and efforts dissipate. And then 2) Outside of the internal cultural influence there is the impact of the world at large that operates outside the control of the enterprise. This is the stuff of meltdowns.

The ability to recognize the available cues before a meltdown emerges can save valuable resources. If we are distracted by the causes and conditions before the meltdown, we will be unable to incorporate what presents itself in a fashion that will avoid disaster. Engaged Emergence is about being present enough to see what is emerging as it emerges.

Which is less costly—predicting what doesn't happen and/or missing what does, or seeing what's happening as it emerges and being able to incorporate it into present action? Engaged Emergence is attending to the cause and condition and then being able to witness the effect and respond accordingly. Mindfilled action is getting caught in the cause and condition and becoming a victim of the effect because it cannot be seen until after it has happened.

What is possible when we can make decisions by facing what emerges as it becomes known? What benefit arises from that ability to be present? For one, when we operate in the world as it happens, the possible is actual. There is no separation. This is also not a mystical occurrence. It is the meeting place where resources not only afford the emergence of the new and novel, but also the same place where new and novel resources can also emerge.

Now it may seem that to be able to recognize these events as they transpire requires a certain clairvoyant capability, but as my colleague Dr. Les Forman explained, that is not the case. Much like a psychotherapist, it does require us to be able to listen from a place that psychodynamic therapists call *free floating attention*. And, we're not going to operate effectively within this possibility space if we are already mindfilled. At its core, every emergent action takes place within the context of our ability to articulate it, so in order to deliver the message of what we see, we must not only witness it we must also be able to hear how it manifests itself so we can express it. If we can't listen with the appropriate capacity to grasp the message, if our minds are too distracted, it may mean that we miss the opportunity.

In honing this faculty to become engaged observers of the world in front of us and spot the cues that point us in the direction of new possibilities, we can also miss the opportunity if we limit our observations to strategic issues or the next hot item. Enterprise leaders often think they know what outcomes they want to take place and so they keep their focus and approach purely strategic. However, if we are actively opening our perceptions to the emergent opportunities that may make themselves available, we must also be ready to broaden our vision to include new outcomes that may arise and be required to satisfy the real need of the enterprise. This is a significant departure from the thinking that, as a matter of course, we define outcomes and goals and then create strategies to meet those outcomes. It compels us to rework our attachments to traditional outcomes as our only choices, and transform them, to say, focus on development rather than growth. The notion of growth, while certainly

appealing to a short-term vision of exit strategies and market caps, may not be the best strategy for an enterprise that is looking for sustainability and longevity over the long haul. An example of this refocusing on new outcomes can be found in the emergence of green economies, where new answers to issues of environmental sustainability and financial opportunity are forcing us to look differently at our traditionally desired strategies.

Recognizing emergent opportunities as they make themselves known rather than after the fact might be the difference between creating a revolutionary market shift and following a safer and more linear progressed change that may actually lead an enterprise toward a less successful outcome. But we can only realize such shift if we can develop and trust the skills to see what is about to emerge and then allow for the listening, reflection and conversations out of which these emergent opportunities can properly manifest.