

Editor's Note (5.3)

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¹ ISCE

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During the five years of this journal, much attention has been paid to the vagaries associated with various words and concepts important to the complexity perspective. Recently I attended a meeting on Evolution and Emergence, which brought home to me the continuing gap between how many of the concepts are used in the sciences and how they get used within the domain of human organizations. The word in question is the very title of this journal: emergence.

The scientists attending the meeting placed an emphasis on the idea that the only type of emergence worthy of consideration was what they referred to as “ontological” emergence: the arrival into the world of something truly new. An awareness of new properties or descriptions as one crosses levels of analysis was dismissed as mere “epistemological emergence” and “subject to reduction: therefore not worthy of discussion.” The exceptions to this view came from yours truly and from Stuart Kauffman.

The quasi-realist bias of the attendees was evident, and perhaps the rejection of the validity of descriptive claims stemmed from the realist perspective. From the perspective of a pragmatically based constructivism, there is an ontological validity to observations that are new to the observer. For that observer, newly cognized entities are indeed new entities and the new cognition can lead to a change in perspective or behavior. The scientists at the conference rejected this assertion. They afforded no validity to the idea that for any given set of observers a concept, description, property, or entity might be new. To them, validity was ascribed only to absolute newness; that is, for all possible sets of observers (i.e., the universe) the observed entity was new. Thus the scientists placed an emphasis on the process of emergence and on its uniqueness. By contrast, those concerned with human organizations recognize that emergence of the observer-dependent cognitive variety is a common occurrence with manifold consequences.

In human organizations it is not the process of emergence that has lasting significance; instead, it is the consequences of the process—systemlevel changes in properties, descriptions, labels, cognitions—the emergents that are afforded import. These changes are highly observer dependent. It is not always the case that the members of the organization (the agents) will have an awareness of the system-level properties giving rise to the emergence/emergents in question. The presence or absence of such awareness gives rise to the possibility of a feedback loop, which itself may then lead to further emergence or to resistance to such emergence. This type of feedback loop is usually not even a possibility in the emergence models of the scientists and further distinguishes the concerns and activities of human organizations from the computer models and biological experiments with which the emergence scientists are concerned.

The feedback loop has yet another consequence: In human organizations the opportunity for communication about the pressures and resistance to what are recognized as emergents summons the equivalent of an immune system response. This response has a further critical distinction: The co-adaptation of a transformation may be incorporated into the “self” requiring protection. Biological organisms seldom incorporate systemic transformation into definitions of self; human organizations do it often.

Indeed, this journal is about to undergo such a transformation. Beginning with Volume 6 our publisher will no longer be Laurence Erlbaum Associates but will become Palgrave/Macmillan. Our format will once again include an in-print paper edition. Our title will continue as *Emergence*, but the words following the colon will change to reflect a broader scope: *Complexity and Organization*. The journal will bring together the efforts of three organizations: the Institute for the Study of Coherence and Emergence, the Complexity Society of the UK, and the Cynnefin Institute of IBM and the University of Cardiff.

Emergence such as this has many lasting emergents. Readers and potential contributors are urged to visit the journal's website at www.emergence.org to learn how our reviewing methods are being tightened, how we will be encouraging the submission and publication of practitioner-oriented articles, and how we have reorganized the editorial board to reflect our widened scope. I am pleased to announce that *Emergence* will have three editors-in-chief: Peter Allen, Jeffrey Goldstein, and David Snowden; and a new managing editor, Steven Barth. The next issue (5.4) will be my last as editor, though I will continue with the journal in a new role as Founding Editor Emeritus and with a regular short column.

Emergence (the journal) has seen the complexity and organization community transform over the past five years and we have been proud of our role in that transformation. Thanks are due to our readers, editors, contributors, reviewers, and the many members of the Complex-M Internet mailing list. *Emergence* is emerging—despite what the hard scientists and realists might think.