

Introducing the reviews

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We were not handed any kind of “mission statement” by the *Emergence* editor, though it is fair to say that all three of us shared the concern expressed in the title of McKelvey’s article in the founding issue: “Complexity Theory in Organization Science: Seizing the Promise or Becoming a Fad?” The best way to find out which is true is to take on the job of reviewing the books. So that is what we have done.

Books: We began with the modern way of doing things: “Let’s do a search on Amazon.com and see what we come up with, using two key words: complexity and management.” Then complexity and organization ... then chaos and management ... and on and on. But mostly it was complexity/chaos and management/organization in the title that got books on to our list. We aimed to get recently published books—most came out in 1997 or 1998. We have a couple of 1999s and a number of earlier ones. Some books were added to the list as we started through the review process. Reviewer candidates often suggested books, some of which had escaped our far-flung net—for example, Goldstein’s *The Unshackled Organization* has neither “complexity” nor “chaos” in its title. A number of interesting suggestions arrived too late, so they will have to wait until future issues of *Emergence*. We lost from our list only one book, Peter Allen’s *Cities and Regions as Self-Organizing Systems* (1997), because the single reviewer of this book became overwhelmed by his travel schedule. Since two authors, Meg Wheatley and Ralph Stacey, could be called the “godparents of complexity/chaos theory applied to management,” we included their earlier influential books as well as their most recent ones. All this adds up to 34 books actually reviewed.

Since management academics’, complexity scientists’, and practitioners’ perspectives are different, we use multiple perspectives on at least some books—it being impossible to do this for all of them. Based on the best indications of sales popularity we could find, we selected some “trade” books for three reviews each—organization science academic, complexity scientist, and consultant/executive. Others deemed “academic” rather than “trade” got two reviewers—management academic and complexity scientist. One book ended up with four reviews and a couple of reviewers didn’t get the job done so the count isn’t quite what we targeted, but it’s pretty close nevertheless. This process gives one a more balanced and often a more provocative introduction to many of the books.

Reviewers: Because of the Santa Fe Institute’s working paper series and books, the NECSI and Organization Science complexity conferences, and complexity/chaos theory-focused publications in organization science, strategy, and management, we knew many people who made excellent candidates to write reviews. In addition, we took advantage of all of the Internet server lists available to NECSI to canvass for reviewers worldwide. We wanted our final list to contain a composite of (1) management academics; (2) complexity scientists who could hold authors accountable to a correct understanding of complexity science; and (3) consultants and executives who could review books from the perspective of managers trying to get the job done in the real world. Our pool to select from eventually grew, via the Internet, to nearly 200 people—from all around the world—and with all three kinds of experts well represented. As a result, we could hold to high standards of selecting only (1) experienced academics with solid and relevant publication records; (2) consultants with well-established consulting practices; and (3) high-ranking executives. We avoided using authors of the books being reviewed (with one harmless exception) and other conflict of interest situations—we nearly had one candidate reviewing a book written by a superior—with one probable exception here as well. Nor did we attempt to “steer” reviewers according to any agenda that we might have had: our instructions to reviewers, which accompanied the books, stated: “Book reviewers are free to write in their own style, to emphasize what they consider to be of importance or interest with respect to the book under review, and to arrive at their own judgment of a book’s merits or shortcomings.” We ended up with 49 reviewers writing 55 reviews. An unexpected joy in this process was the many delightful e-mail discussions with academics, consultants, and executives—wonderful people scattered globally in farflung universities and businesses. The only hard copies of anything sent anywhere were the actual books being reviewed.

Thanks: We started this job in January. We ended in June. We need to thank all of the people who volunteered to be a reviewer and all of those who were reviewers and got their job done on time. Most reviewers did such a good job that we made minimal editorial changes. In a couple of cases we had to ask for further clarification or deal with an English-as-second-language difficulty. The words you read are straight from the reviewers, untarnished by us. The nominal word length was 1000. One is shorter than this; most are on target. Some reviewers really wrote review essays. We took them all.

Really! They are fun to read!! They are also interesting and very insightful. If you are a CEO, reading the reviews could be more instructive than reading the books! Authors may not like us to say this. But reading all the reviews—by academics, consultants, and executives about all of the 34 books is surely a view of complexity science applied to management that one could never obtain from any single book. Seldom does one get such a varied, balanced, and provocative perspective of managerial discourse in one place. This is the real treat for you if you take time to go through the reviews, something that we

enthusiastically encourage. Missing even just one means that you risk not reading one that focuses on precisely your concerns. And finally, as a teaser, you don't want to miss reading what is quite possibly the cleverest review of them all, by an "unfit female" who takes on and discursively wrestles with an author promoting "hairy-chested leadership." You can decide for yourself who goes down for the count...