

Is adaptability enough?

December 31, 2008 · Classic Paper

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Vickers G, Vickers G. Is adaptability enough?. Emergence: Complexity and Organization. 2008 Dec 31 [last modified: 2016 Nov 30]. Edition 1. doi: 10.emerg/10.17357.2c185649c73ac65292e7edc0983936ac.

Abstract

Introduction

At the beginning of 2008 this would have been an interesting, timely, and relevant, but not necessarily prescient paper. Now, at the end of 2008 / beginning of 2009, one can only wish that those in charge of the regulatory processes that control industrialization and the market had taken Sir Geoffrey's insightful writings more seriously.

In his 1959 article, Sir Geoffrey discussed the links among multi-level multi-system relations, behavior, regulation, feedback, learning, and democracy and the marketplace. Without computer modeling, he understood that these were related concepts that produced and responded to their shared histories and mutual futures. He concluded that adaptation is not enough. He urged government, through regulatory processes and good governance, to anticipate the disturbances of rapid industrialization, and to understand that satisfying needs creates more needs.

The paper serves as a rich store of insights and hypotheses for many disciplines. Since this is a volume on conflict theory and complexity science, let me draw your attention to the simple brilliance of his analysis on conflict arising from regulatory decision-making about change. "The resolving of conflict, exceptional in most creatures, is our most constant and familiar activity. This is what decision means. It involves choosing one, at the cost of rejecting many other alternatives."

He posed a series of fundamental questions about conflict that are significant because a system's character can be described by how conflicts are resolved. Our governments' and the market's decision-making about priorities and policies both creates and resolves conflicts. Thus, his advise to deepen our understanding of those systems' disturbances, responses, and the limits on their freedom to choose how to respond, is essential reading.

Notes

Originally published as Vickers, G. (1959). "Is adaptability enough?," in W. Buckley (ed.), *Modern Systems Research for the Behavioral Scientist*, Aldine Publishing Company (1968), pp. 460-473. Reprinted with kind permission.