

Editor's note (1.2)

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1 ISCE

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Books on the topic of complexity and management have become numerous enough to fill several bookshelves in even a nonspecialist bookstore. Magazines such as *Fast Company* and *Business 2.0* pride themselves on presentations of new ways of thinking about new ways of doing business in the new economy. The leading management consulting firms compete with regard to whose business models better capture “being on the edge.” This issue of *Emergence* is our attempt to sort through this sea of words and discern some meaning.

The issue is the collective work of more than 50 reviewers and editors. It examines a collection of 34 books on the topic of complexity and management, and in so doing, cites the work of more than 100 authors. Due to production constraints such a work is by nature incomplete, but we believe that we have accurately captured the market for complexity and management books, as it existed as of the beginning of 1999. Since then, another dozen such books have appeared (including my own *The Next Common Sense*, written with Johan Roos). These books will be reviewed in future issues of *Emergence*.

What I derive from reading the work herein is the conviction that much remains to be done to help managers derive value from a process of iterative reflection between explanatory narrative and abstract formal models. For example, none of the books or of the reviews cites an alternative to Shannon, Donald M. MacKay's content- and context-based theory of information. It is an absence sorely missed, in that the very act of managing is one of content and context. By contrast, although many of the reviewers and many of the books reviewed display a strong preference regarding the choice between abstract and narrative perspectives, few articulate a desire for or a means of blending the two to make pragmatic progress in what it means to manage the complex organizations of today. Bill McKelvey and Steve Maguire, special editors for this issue, make a significant step in bridging this gap.

Such a bridging is vital, I believe, if complex systems perspectives are to make a long-term contribution to the management profession. Those of a metaphorical bent correctly ascribe problems to the direct application of theory derived like Shannon's—purposely absent of context and content. Those of a more formal bent correctly despair of the absence of predictive or explanatory abilities of the more narrative and metaphorical approaches. The way forward does not appear to lie in polemic debate between these perspectives, but in iterative reflection on their application. On that road this special issue is an important step.

For both manager and academic, having a means of assessing the state of this arena is vital, and, I believe, you are holding such a means in your hand.

My thanks to the reviewers and my heartfelt thanks to the special editors. Job well done.