

Book Notes

for

Complexity and Emergence in Organizations Series

Notes compiled by Jim Force Enterprises Inc.

The purpose of these notes is to provide an in-depth overview of the content of this important series.

Griffin, D. (2002). *The emergence of leadership: Linking self-organization and ethics*. London: Routledge.

There is, therefore, no simple possibility of knowing how to judge the outcomes of action before acting, since the future is being constructed in the interaction. (p. 15)

What each of us does matters even though we cannot know what the outcome of our actions will be. It is possible that small actions can escalate to transform global situations. (p. 87)

This process of communicative interaction . . . encourages us to believe that this is effective in some way, even though we cannot know how. (p. 87)

In Mead's [1923] definition of novelty it is clearly impossible to specify in advance any rules, simple or complicated, that will lead to the kind of future novelty anyone may have decided upon in advance. (p. 130)

the potential for transformation arises because transformation always involves some shift in power relations, some shift in current identity. (p.172)

Mead sees conflict not only as unavoidable, but also as the very essence of the movement of thought, change and evolution. (p.109)

since novelty is unpredictable, it is impossible to specify in advance any rules, simple or complicated, that will lead to the kind of future novelty anyone may have decided upon in advance. (p. 213)

Streatfield, P. (2001). *The paradox of control in organizations*. London: Routledge.

The fifth theme is that of *conversation* as a self-organizing phenomenon in which meaning emerges. Here the definition of conversation is broad. It incorporates verbal discourse at a surface level and deeply reflective thought, writing and discussion. It covers dialogue, the search of new meaning and the making sense of experience. Conversations may arise spontaneously in the moment, or it can take the form of a slowed-down reflective act of reporting, story-telling or writing narratives. (p. 4)

when managers are able to live with this paradox [being simultaneously "in control" and "not in control"], the resulting tension opens up the potential for new patterns of meaning. (p. 7)

The defining feature of management is not simply being "in control," but rather the courage to carry on participating creatively in spite of "not knowing." (p. 12)

it [communicative interaction] is to a significant extent spontaneous and so cannot proceed according to pre-established rules. (p. 23)

Performance seemed to emerge more from the interaction of events than by design. (p. 25)

Kanter (1984, 1988) argues that uncertainty makes timing and costs so difficult to project that planning cannot be the main approach to managing the innovation process. She argues that leaders should develop the right environment to foster interactions in which tacit knowledge can be developed. (p. 37)

"In control" means producing consistent results in line with expectations and equal to, or better than, similar companies in the same industry. (p. 51)

The inherent nature of the innovation appears to be that of self-organizing, sense-making processes of conversation between those engaged in particular research projects. (p. 51)

It is relatively easy to become wedded to the logic of plans when one is deeply involved in developing them. (p. 58)

All the words to do with being "in control" featured in our conversations: intention, design, certainty, predictability, and so on. However, the subjective experience was characterized just as much by the words to do with "not being in control," namely, responding, not knowing, unpredictability, and so on. (p. 60)

What is important here is trust as a quality of relationship that emerges in conversational exchanges and facilitates them at the same time. (p. 71)

Cooperative joint action of all kinds was made possible by the ongoing processes of communicative interacting, by the continuous process of people relating to each other. (p. 78)

Creative, in this context, has the sense not of original creativity as performed by the genius but of living spontaneously, in action and reaction, with the contents of one's cultural life . . . Such participation is creative insofar as it changes that in which one participates, even if in small ways . . . (Tillich, 1952: 46) (p. 79)

it was in this communicative interaction that other forms of joint action emerged. (p. 81)

It is in such continued struggles for meaning, and the imaginative elaboration going with it, that the novel emerges. (p. 87)

It is in their struggling to understand each other in fluid, spontaneous conversational exchanges that people create new knowledge. (p. 90)

Creative sense making depends on qualities of conversation that enable fluid exchange and the coercive use of power may stifle the process or drive it underground. (p. 112)

The willingness of people to open up depends upon the perceived risks involved. (p. 112)

The budget meeting was a messy experience in which we had to work with ambiguity, with little information, with not really knowing totally what we were doing or what the impact of our decisions would be. This contrasts strongly with the analytical/prescriptive flavor presented in the literature. (p. 120)

The self-organizing interactions of the themes organizing our experience and the emergent nature of the outcome does not in any way mean that we were interacting without intention. (123)

Rather, I mean the courage to carry on participating creatively with others in the construction of meaning, despite not being "in control." This amounts to the courage to live with paradox and the anxiety generated by the potential loss of meaning. (p. 132)

The distinguishing feature of management is not control but courage. (p. 133)

I continually experience the frustration of feeling that I am not good enough because the control I am supposed to exercise never seems to materialize as it should. (p. 137)

A fundamental aspect of the most intimate exchanges in conversation is the perception of trust in relationship. (p. 138)

The tension between the stable and the unstable, the ordered and the disordered, the self and other, and the meaningful and meaningless is experienced as anxiety. I am suggesting that this could be a source of the energy that drives those involved to search for a new and different meaning of the world and their place within it. The presence of anxiety is therefore normal, healthy and essential for the emergence of novelty and change in the work environment. (p. 139)

Fonseca, J. (2002). *Complexity and innovation in organizations*. London: Routledge.

The term "innovation" makes most people think first about technology . . . this is unfortunate, for our emerging world requires more social and organizational innovation. (Kanter, 1984: 20) (p. 3)

Innovation will be presented as the emergent continuity and transformation of patterns of human interaction, understood as ongoing, ordinary complex responsive processes of human relating in local situations in the living present. (p. 3)

Innovation is then simply new patterning of our experience of being together. (p. 5)

I will argue that innovation is the emergence of new meaning and that such new meaning emerges in conversations between people that are characterized by a paradoxical dynamic of understanding and misunderstanding at the same time. (p. 8)

Innovation at its core is about ambiguity and is replete with disputes caused by differences in perspectives among those touched by an innovation and the change it engenders, we believe that innovation often becomes a very political process. (p. 23)
Frost and Egri (1991: 231)

Innovation always changes patterns of action, and changes in patterns of action always amount to shifts in figurations of power relations. (p. 42)

What he [Oliveira] was, what he found himself able to do, had emerged in the long process of his relating to many others over many years. (p. 44)

I also began to notice how the escalating misunderstanding between us sometimes seemed to provoke sudden breakthroughs into some insight that we had not previously had. (p. 52)

innovation was essentially a conversational process, a process of communicative interaction between people characterized by redundant diversity experienced as misunderstanding, all of which seemed to be requirements for the emergence of novelty. (p. 53)

The conversational diversity of people with different backgrounds, the redundant explorations and the misunderstanding generated were all ways of talking that were essential to the emergence of new themes and new sense. (p. 54)

Descriptions of innovations normally start at the point at which it is possible to set out a project with scheduled activities and milestones. This starting point omits the redundant, dissipative activities that create the historical context of an innovation's origins and influence its direction. (p. 67)

Innovation emerges in the amplification of the diversity between participants in interactive communication, even when that diversity is quite small. (p. 79)

What he [Prigogine, 1998] is saying is that disorder, randomness and chaos, all normally thought to be wasteful or redundant are essential to the emergence of the new because new order emerges in the destruction of amplified diversity. (p. 86)

In human communicative interaction, I suggest, redundant diversity is experienced as misunderstanding. (p. 86)

Innovation is not a function or a rational choice but a potential in all communicative interaction. (p. 90)

the intensive search for understanding leads to the emergence of new meaning. (p. 93)

The progress of the work depended not on some procedure but on their personal relationships with each other. (p. 105)

It became clear to me that it was just this daily misunderstanding that drove people to engage in more intensive conversations, which served to dissipate the misunderstanding and so sustain a fragile, easily destroyed, dissipative structure of meaning. (p. 106)

when people engage in the kind of conversation that produces emergent new meaning, there is no one who is able to control the flow and direction of the conversation or the meanings that emerge. (pp. 112-113)

I use the notion of "transformation of redundant diversity" to describe the process by which misunderstanding is reduced so as to enable enough agreement on the meaning of words, sufficient new meaning, to form the basis of the next action. I am talking about temporary stabilizations in mis/understanding in the flow of conversations and I understand conversations to be the essential process of innovation. (p. 113)

It became clear to me that my efforts to remain "neutral", to retain the position of the detached observer, were counterproductive. (p. 116)

Trust becomes, therefore, a powerful reinforcement of the networks of conversations, as much as the conversations become a reinforcement of trust among the participants. It enables other people to get into conversation characterized by high levels of mis/understanding. (p. 116)

When some new meaning is developed and accepted, as an organizing theme for a new pattern of talk in the living present, people start to act in a more sequential manner. (p. 116)

Shaw, P. (2002). *Changing conversations in organizations: A complexity approach to change*. London: Routledge.

conversation as a process of communicative action which has the intrinsic capacity to pattern itself. No single individual or group has control over the forms that emerge, yet between us we are continuously shaping and being shaped by those forms from within the flow of our responsive relating. (p. 11)

we could approach the work of organizational change as improvisational ensemble work of a narrative, conversational nature. (p. 28)

a paradoxical kind of logic in which we see ourselves as participating in the self-organizing emergence of meaningful activity from within our disorderly open-ended responsiveness to one another. (p. 30)

In the movement of our everyday communicative activity, we are creating who we are and what we can do together within shifting constraints of a material, technological and social nature. (p. 30)

It is becoming increasingly clear that simple control over the outcome of complex interaction is indeed illusory. (p. 30)

we are simultaneously shaped by and shape our conversations. . . . the outcome of our conversation was emerging in an unplanned, unpredictable way, yet recognizable enough for us both to continue response by response. (p. 31)

At that point he no longer had a very clear idea of how the meeting 'should' develop and so, as we gathered, we were all improvising. (p. 31)

acting into the unknown. (p. 32)

Even so, we are not starting with a blank sheet. Everyone is 'making sense' with others of their participation and that sense has to make connections with the past and the possible future. The under-specification increases the experience of diversity and multiplicity, disturbing routinized responses and increasing the potential for novelty. (p. 32)

I try to play a part in this by participating in the conversation in a way that helps to hold open the interplay of sense-making rather longer than would occur in my absence, to hold open the experience of not-knowing. (p. 33)

In a way, the participants are constructing an emergent story, or more accurately a complex web of stories in which they themselves and the activities in which they are engaged are evolving as meaning shifts and evolves. (p. 40)

We are not 'just talking'. We are acting together to shape ourselves and our world. (p. 40)

The are lies in moving into what might be emerging without too fixed an idea of what each move will lead to. (p. 42)

learning our way forward into a future of our own making. However what is not unique to me is a way of thinking about the processes of organizing in terms of conversational gatherings where we take action to shape and reshape the meanings of our enterprises and of ourselves. (p. 43)

We are 'reforming' and 'transforming' in a very practical way the movement of our possible stances and actions in relation to one another and other aspects of our circumstances in order to 'make possible' how and where to go on from here. (p. 48)

The organization of the setting continues to emerge in a self-organizing way as people interweave their communicative action and that organization continues to invite and motivate and limit our next possible actions as we continue to communicate. (p. 49)

This attitude, that says I cannot know the meaning of my activities before acting, invites me to be as present as possible to the improvisational possibilities of what I am doing. (p. 63)

Our relations are creative engagements in which we make our identities as we strive to influence the conditions for going on together. 'I' cannot go on being the same 'me' without continuing to relate to 'you' in a certain way, and if that way shifts we are both a little different. (p. 73)

We know we can potentially make a difference but we cannot know in advance of our acting how the emerging meaning of that difference will continue to develop. (p. 95)

It was possible to identify, in retrospect, key moments when the story took creative leaps, but at the time each moment in the movement of the story was experienced as a moment full of uncertainty and potential. (p. 103)

we placed ourselves in a situation where we were all acting (in the everyday sense) into the unknown. (p. 107)

There was design and planning, but not of an overarching kind that had a complete 'vision' of a project in mind in the early stages. (p. 111)

as we communicated with ourselves and with one another, we were constrained by our history of relating as social persons. (p. 114)

we all discovered that our joint action was indeed beyond our individual control. (p. 114)

Only if people concentrated on responding to whatever others offered, so as to continue to make sense of what had happened and what might happen, could the ensemble sustain itself. (p. 115)

all relating was simultaneously enabling and constraining. (p. 116)

I am using storytelling, drama and ensemble improvisation in particular, as a way of bringing attention to the place of spontaneity in the emergent processes of communicative action. (p. 116)

an acute sense of the paradox of being 'in charge but not in control' as we strive to play out creatively the evolution of our independent and conflicting responsibilities and aspirations, forming and being formed in the process. (p. 117)

What happens next is always constrained by what has happened before. (p. 122)

We make a difference and become different in a patterning process we can never control. (p. 122)

The facilitation that I am interested in involves participating actively in the movement of sense-making as it evolves in ordinary everyday interaction. (p. 150)

[I am seeking] to live with others in the paradox that every inclusion is simultaneously exclusionary, every exclusion simultaneously inclusionary, every expression of identity is simultaneously an expression of difference. (p. 150)

I actively take up responsibility with others for participating in the often fraught processes by which we are always coming to know ourselves and what we are in the process of doing. (p. 152)

I do encourage people to rely less on pre-set agendas and ready made presentations and to engage one another in exploratory conversation that generates stability and potential shifts in what we are holding one another to and how we are doing that. Rather than inculcating a special discipline of dialogue, I am encouraging a perception of ensemble improvisation as an organizing craft of communicative action. (p. 164)

Stacey, R. (2001). *Complex responsive processes in organizations: Learning and knowledge creation*. London: Routledge.

Knowledge is not a "thing," or a system, but an ephemeral, active process of relating. (p. 4)

Knowledge cannot be managed, and there is no need to manage it, because knowledge is participative self-organizing processes patterning themselves in coherent ways. (p. 5)

Knowledge is under perpetual construction in the detail of relationships between people. (p. 8)

It is not possible to measure intellectual "capital" in any meaningful way. Even more, it is an illusion to imagine that "you," some powerful person in an organization, can manage learning and knowledge creation, quite simply because no one can manage human minds and human relationships of which knowledge is an essential aspect. (p. 8)

Narrative knowledge takes the form of anecdotes and stories, interspersed with evaluations of them. Tsoukas argues that narrative knowledge is just as important as

propositional knowledge, if not more so, when it comes to life in organizations. (pp. 35-36)

Sense-making is a process of relating in which people co-create, or enact, their environment. This leads him [Weick] to place particular emphasis on talk, discourse, conversation, storytelling and narrative. (p.37)

Meaning is not attached to an object, or stored, but perpetually created in the interaction. (p. 79)

the principle enabling and constraining social process is conversation in words (p. 86)

Although systems, databases, recorded and written artifacts are usually thought of as stores of knowledge, from the complex responsive process perspective they are simply records that can only become knowledge when people use them as tools in their processes of gesturing and responding to each other. (p. 96)

Knowledge, then, is not stored but perpetually created. (p. 97)

The knowledge assets of an organization, then, lie in the pattern of relationships between its members and are destroyed when those relational patterns are destroyed. (p. 98)

It is only in this action of using the artifact, reading the book, that meaning emerges. However, the symbol itself cannot be stored simply because it is an action, a gesture. Meaning, knowledge itself, therefore, cannot be stored. Any store of recorded symbols becomes simply a tool for potential use in communicative processes and their construction of meaning. (p. 101)

This action-based approach [verses a rule-driven approach] emphasizes the social, or collaborative nature of the action of talking in which people make sense of their actions together, taking account of each other's sensibilities, spontaneously sustaining and repairing their unceasing flow of speech-entwined activity in an unreflective, unforced, unplanned and unintended way (Shotter and Katz, 1996). (p. 131)

People resonate with each other and they may grasp something new, unseen but sensed in the emerging interaction. They are not transmitting information about things but, rather, they are going on with each other in a responsive expression and potential understanding that grows from their very interaction. (p. 133)

As people converse with each other there are many small misunderstandings and few large ones. Stability of meaning is thereby preserved. However, this kind of stability is always in tension with instability. In other words, as they converse, people never fully understand each other and no one knows what has been well understood and what has been misunderstood. For this reason, conversational themes trigger others along unexpected and unpredictable routes. Small misunderstandings may escalate and major ones suddenly occur with important consequences for joint action. (p. 143)

If there is little misunderstanding between people forming a group with well-established concepts and ways of talking to each other, their conversations are likely to be repetitive. If there is too much misunderstanding between people drawn from very many disparate groups, then there is the disintegration of communication, a "tower of Babel." This is where the tension between conformity and deviance becomes important. (pp. 143-144)

What I find fascinating about the action-based, social explanation of human communicating is this: the very features that account of the stability that enables collaboration also account for its disruption. Even more fascinating is the way in which this disruption is essential to the emergence of novelty in human communicative action. (p. 148)

One of the central insights of the complexity sciences is how the spontaneous emergence of novelty depends upon diversity (Allen, 1998a, 1998b). (p. 149)

Fantasy is close to imaginative elaboration and misunderstanding triggers a search for understanding thereby provoking continued imaginative elaboration and communication. It is such continued struggles for meaning and the imaginative elaboration going with it, that the novel emerges (p. 150)

The immediate consequence of such interdependence is that the behavior of every individual is both enabled and constrained by the expectations and demands of both others and themselves. To carry on participating in the communicative interaction upon which an individual's very life depends, that individual has to rely on the enabling cooperation of others. At the same time that individual has to respect the wishes of others and those wishes will frequently conflict with his or her own. Communicative interaction is, thus, the patterning of enabling and conflicting constraints, a central feature of any complex process. (p. 150)

there is no guarantee that the transformation which does emerge will be judged to be creative as opposed to destructive, or ethical as opposed to unethical. (p. 155)

Any change in the process of communicative interaction must at the same time constitute a shift in power relations and, therefore, a change in the pattern of who is "in" and who is "out." Such shifts generate intense anxiety and communicative interaction is recruited in some way to deal with this existential anxiety. (p. 156)

change cannot be controlled by anyone. (p. 156)

Interaction itself amplifies small differences in communication into discontinuous, novel change, so operating as transformative cause. (p. 163)

"knowledge" artifacts, symbolizing identities past, may be used as tools in local communicative interaction in the living present. (p. 164)

Societies, organizations, groups and individuals are always reaching for identity but they can never possess it, simply because by its very nature it is not a thing but a process, continuously reproduced and potentially transformed in the living present. It follows that it is impossible to draw clear boundaries around a society, a group or an individual. (p. 168)

The most obvious themes [patterning communicative interaction] . . . are the publicly proclaimed visions, values and cultures of an organization, as well as its hierarchically defined roles, policies, procedures, plans and ways of using its tools, that is, its information and control systems and its technologies. (p. 174)

The patching analogy suggests that the social process may be one that patterns communicative interaction as clusters of strong connections linked to other clusters by much weaker connections. (p. 180)

this analogy [from the complexity sciences] suggests that transformative potential arises in conversations when participants are diverse, that is, sufficiently different to each other. In these conditions interaction may amplify small differences into major discontinuous changes in understanding. . . . It is in their struggle to understand each other in fluid, spontaneous conversational exchanges that people create new knowledge. (p. 182)

conversational processes, having transformative potential, by their very nature threaten the continuity of identity. (p. 182)

If knowledge is process, if it is emergent themes patterning the experience of being together in the living present, if it is ordinary, everyday human relating in conversation and other kinds of communication in local situations, then it makes no sense to talk about measuring and managing it. (p. 192)

Knowledge is therefore not some cognitive framework but a continually reproduced and potentially transformed pattern of intertwined feeling (body rhythms), thinking (private role play) and acting (social relating). (p. 198)

at some critical level of fantasy and misunderstanding one would expect the dynamics of potential transformation in the reproduction of patterns of relating, that is of potential novelty. (p. 205)

Ordinary, communicative interaction is not necessarily safe at all and the interesting question is how we understand the nature and impact of inevitable resistance and defensive routines, and how we cope with any lack of safety. (p. 217)

Knowledge cannot be grasped, owned by anyone or traded in any market and its creation is a process of communicating and power relating that is both stimulating and anxiety provoking at the same time. (p. 220)

While participants do, of course, engage in the process with intention and foreknowledge, no one can predict how the experience will evolve or what will be learned, individually and collectively. It is, therefore, impossible to set learning outcomes in advance in any truly meaningful sense. The meaning will emerge in the session. (p. 226)

knowledge creation is not a system but a process that cannot be designed in advance nor manipulated from a macro, outside position. (p. 229)

From this perspective [complex responsive processes], accountability and responsibility do not mean achieving targeted consequences, they mean the ethical, moral requirement to take responsibility for one's actions and account to one's fellows for what one is doing. (p. 230)

It [the complex responsive processes perspective] focuses on the "ordinary" on the basis that it is in ongoing communicative interaction between everyone in an organization, and with people in other organizations, that learning occurs and knowledge arises. (p. 234)