

Working with Emergence

By Petra Griffiths and Heather-Jane Ozanne

We need to shift from experts who analyse and interpret, to facilitators who through active discourse enable emergence of new understanding and perspective.

David J Snowden

This spontaneous emergence of order at critical points of instability, which is often referred to simply as “emergence,” is one of the hallmarks of life. It has been recognized as the dynamic origin of development, learning, and evolution. In other words, creativity—the generation of new forms—is a key property of all living systems.

Fritjof Capra, In the Hidden Connections (2002), 116-117

Heather-Jane Ozanne writes:

Spirit of Peace

The idea for the forthcoming workshop (see end of article) arises out of work within the charity Spirit of Peace (www.spiritofpeace.co.uk). The concept of working with emergence grew from life experience in social and community work and peace-building in the Middle East. A further inspiration came from a Rabbi who said that one of the obstacles to peace is that the ME is a ‘tyranny of certitude’. People are so fixed in their ideas of what they want and how to solve the issues that meaningful dialogue and collaborative solutions and agreements cannot be reached.

In Spirit of Peace we also see that the necessity and value of working with emergence relates to the growing speed of change and cultural diversity which we face in our contemporary and global society. For long term plans to be effective they need to involve a process of continuous review and assessment of current needs and emerging realities, and wide participation from all sections of a community need to be included, if we are to work ‘towards the good of all’. Rather than creating large strategic plans, using emergent process, we invite the communities we engage with to come together and build authentic relationships out of which conversations, connections and joint action can arise, usually involving elements which are greater than the sum of the parts and arriving at a place of greater mutuality.

Emergence is a process that allows us to work in a way where possibilities not apparent at the beginning can emerge. This requires certain qualities or concepts. Intentionally working with emergence or emergent processes calls for openness, a deep process of listening to self, others and the evolving situation, a sense of being led by future possibility, not just a reaction to present problems or issues, humility and collaborative approaches to decision-making.

Other aspects of working with emergence can include trust, patience, taking responsibility for what is mine to do and commitment. Working with emergence can produce an outcome that enables a greater consensus or buy-in within a group setting. It enables the possibility of working with the complexity of a situation as it emerges and allows co-creativity, inclusivity and mutuality in relation to the outcomes.

Petra Griffiths writes:

Examples in the prison system and in supporting people affected by cancer

An example which has been covered in the national media recently is the impressive work in the massively overstressed prison system in the UK, carried out by The Centre for Peaceful Solutions <https://www.centreforpeacefulsolutions.org>. In a Guardian article Hattie Garlick reported that the training scheme being run at Dartmoor is enabling prisoners to work with one another to find solutions to disputes, which has the potential to lead to a significant reduction in violence and suicide.

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/feb/10/can-prisoners-resolve-disputes-dartmoor-mediation>)

At Paul's Cancer Support Centre where I was Director, we consistently found that the most significant and innovative initiatives were not things that had been signposted in our strategic plans, but new projects that suddenly sprung up – such as discovering the Healing Journey Programme which had been running and been researched at a major cancer centre in Toronto, and which we were able to introduce into the UK, bringing significant improvements in wellbeing to many people affected by cancer. It was vital in enabling us to do this kind of pioneering work to have a Board of Trustees who were open to emergent possibilities, rather than sticking rigidly to the plans that had been agreed.

Books on the ways in which organisations are already working with emergence

It has been a revelation to read books such as **Frederic Laloux's *Reinventing Organisations*** (2014). A Guide to creating organisations inspired by the next stage of human consciousness; and **Oscar Scharmer and Katrin Kaufer's *Leading from the Emerging Future. From Ego-system to Eco System Economies*** (2013). Laloux is an organisational consultant and Scharmer and Kaufer are both connected with Massachusetts Institute for Technology. In Laloux's book twelve pioneer organisations from industry, education and healthcare show how soulful businesses, non-profits, schools and hospitals can be created. Scharmer and Kaufer argue that a new paradigm of thought is needed involving a shift from ego to eco-system. An eco-system is a system whose elements interact with their surroundings – the ecological, social, intellectual and spiritual context as a unit – the whole house. They post that our shared reality needs to be the centre of our attention and when it is we can allow our shared economic reality to change us and we'll develop economic ideas that can be helpful, healing and transformative. This will involve organising around the commons (see <http://peter-barnes.org/article/state-commons/>)

Where does the idea of emergence come from?

The term emergence was first used to define a philosophical concept by George Henry Lewis in 1875. ..it recognises that in physical systems the whole is often more than the sum of its parts....at each level of complexity, new and often surprising qualities emerge that cannot, at least in any straightforward manner, be attributed to known properties of its constituents. The development of the different strands of thought about emergence within philosophy and scientific disciplines is the subject of the academic volume **Clayton, P and Davies, P** (Eds, 2006). ***The Re-Emergence of Emergence: The Emergentist Hypothesis from Science to Religion.***

An example of the application of emergence to the theological sphere is the chapter by **Paul Davies** entitled **Teleology without Teleology: Purpose through Emergent Complexity** in another academic volume entitled ***In Whom We Live, and Move and Have our Being. Panentheistic Reflections on God's Presence in a Scientific World.*** Clayton, P and Peacocke, A. (Eds, 2004). Paul Davies is Professor of Natural Philosophy at the Australian Centre for Astrobiology. He has held academic appointments in astronomy, physics and mathematics, and in 1995 won the Templeton Prize which honours a living person who has made an exceptional contribution to affirming life's spiritual dimension.

As Paul Davies sees it “..the intrinsic creativity of nature results from the inherently self-organising potentialities of the laws of nature. Thus the emergence of complexity in no way warrants appeal to special divine action in particular events. ...although nature's complexity appears to be the product of intentional design and purpose, it is entirely the result of natural processes..... The laws of the universe have a remarkable ability to canalize

encourage, and facilitate the evolution of matter and energy along pathways leading to greater organisational complexity.”

There are many variants of understanding about emergence however, in the scientific realm and elsewhere. The workshop in May will no doubt cover a number of different views.

Workshop on Working with Emergence. Organised by the Institute for Theological Partnerships at the University of Winchester, in partnership with Spirit of Peace and Living Spirituality Connections – 19 May 2018. The second in our **Pathways to Human Flourishing** series.

We are excited to have the opportunity to hear from experts in working with emergence in the fields of organisational consultancy and evolutionary theology. Chris Mowles, Professor of Complexity and Management at the University of Hertfordshire and an organisational consultant, will give us a grounding in the concept of emergence. He will also then enable participants to have an experience of it through a group process. In the afternoon Rev Dr Terry Biddington, Eco Theologian and Dean of Spiritual Life at Winchester, will be looking at the emergence of interiority and the development of religion in an evolving universe. After much rich input, there will be a chance to discuss in small groups how people see emergent processes relating to their everyday life and work.

We do hope you will join us in this exciting exploration. To book go to:

<http://store.winchester.ac.uk/conferences-and-events/institute-for-theological-partnerships/events/working-with-emergence>

To view the event poster go to: www.livingspirit.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/emergence_poster.pdf

To view practical details for those attending, go to: www.livingspirit.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/practical_details_for_workshop_attendees.pdf

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