

COHERENCE IN THE MIDST
OF COMPLEXITY

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ADVANCES IN SOCIAL COMPLEXITY THEORY

Hugo Letiche and Michael Lissack
with Ron Schultz

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Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2011 978-0-230-33850-0

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First published in 2011 by

PALGRAVE MACMILLAN® in the United States – a division of St. Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

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ISBN 978-1-349-34147-4

ISBN 978-1-137-00180-1 (eBook)

DOI 10.1057/9781137001801

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Letiche, Hugo K., 1946–

Coherence in the midst of complexity : advances in social complexity theory / by Hugo Letiche and Michael Lissack with Ron Schultz.

p. cm.

1. Social sciences—Philosophy. 2. Organizational change.
3. Organizational behavior. 4. Complexity (Philosophy) 5. Emergence (Philosophy) I. Lissack, Michael. II. Schultz, Ron, 1951– III. Title.

H61.L5.L48 2011

302.3'501—dc23

2011019901

A catalogue record of the book is available from the British Library.

Design by MPS Limited, A Macmillan Company

First edition: January 2012

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To the friends and colleagues who made the DBA possible.
—Hugo

To Max Boisot and Paul Cilliers, who taught and inspired
much of what lies herein.
—Michael

To Howard Sherman, who challenged us to think in new and
novel ways and provided us with an interactive platform for
the emergence of complexity and business thinking.
—Ron

It can scarcely be denied that the supreme goal of all theory is to make the irreducible basic elements as simple and as few as possible without having to surrender the adequate representation of a single datum of experience.

Whether you can observe a thing or not depends on the theory which you use. It is the theory which decides what can be observed.

Concepts that have proven useful in ordering things easily achieve such authority over us that we forget their earthly origins and accept them as unalterable givens. Thus they might come to be stamped as “necessities of thought,” “a priori givens,” etc. The path of scientific progress is often made impassable for a long time by such errors. Therefore it is by no means an idle game if we become practiced in analysing long-held commonplace concepts and showing the circumstances on which their justification and usefulness depend, and how they have grown up, individually, out of the givens of experience. Thus their excessive authority will be broken. They will be removed if they cannot be properly legitimated, corrected if their correlation with given things be far too superfluous, or replaced if a new system can be established that we prefer for whatever reason.

Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance you must keep moving.

Albert Einstein

This discovery, indeed, is almost of that kind which I call Serendipity, a very expressive word, which, as I have nothing better to tell you, I shall endeavor to explain to you: you will understand it better by the derivation than by the definition. I once read a silly fairy tale, called the three Princes of Serendip: as their Highnesses travelled, they were always making discoveries, by accidents and sagacity, of things which they were not in quest of: for instance, one of them discovered that a mule blind of the right eye had travelled the same road lately, because the grass was eaten only on the left side, where it was worse than on the right—now do you understand Serendipity? One of the most remarkable instances of this accidental sagacity (for you must observe that no discovery of a thing you are looking for comes under this description) was of my Lord Shaftsbury, who happening to dine at Lord Chancellor Clarendon’s, found out the marriage of the Duke of York and Mrs. Hyde, by the respect with which her mother treated her at table.

Horace Walpole, 1754

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MIRACLE

1. An event that is contrary to the established laws of nature and attributed to a supernatural cause.
2. Any amazing or wonderful event.
3. A person or thing that is a marvelous example of something.

SURPRISE

1. To strike or occur with a sudden feeling of wonder or astonishment (as through unexpectedness).
2. To come upon or discover suddenly and unexpectedly.
3. To make an unexpected assault on (an unprepared army, fort, person, etc.).
4. To elicit or bring out suddenly and without warning.
5. To lead or bring unawares (as into doing something not intended).
6. An act or instance of surprising or being surprised.
7. A completely unexpected occurrence, appearance, or statement.
8. An assault, as on an army or a fort, made without warning.
9. A coming upon unexpectedly; detecting in the act; taken unawares.

L. complicātus (ptp. of *complicāre* to fold together), equiv. to *com-* com- + *-plic-* (comb. form of **plecāre* to fold, akin to *plectī* to plait) + *-ātus -ate*

With folds (*plic* = fold)

1. Consisting of parts intricately combined.
2. Difficult to analyze, understand, or explain.

COMPLEX

L. complexus, ptp. of *complectī*, *complectere* to embrace, encompass, include, equiv. to *complect-* (see *complect*) + *-tus* ptp. suffix; (n.) < LL *complexus* totality, *complex* (L: inclusion, grasping, embrace), equiv. to *complect* (ere) + *-tus* suffix of v. action; reanalysis of the L v. as “to intertwine (completely)” has influenced sense of the adj.

With Interweaving

1. Composed of many interconnected parts; compound; composite.
2. An intricate or complicated association or assemblage of related things, parts, or units.
3. A system of interrelated, emotion-charged ideas, feelings, memories, and impulses.

REPRESENTATION

1. The action or fact of one item standing for another.
2. The substitution of an individual or class in place of another.

COMPRESSION

1. Compression is the reduction in size of data in order to save space or transmission time.
2. Compression can be either lossy (some information is permanently lost) or lossless (all information can be restored).