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*Every month **Attractors** shares tips and tools from human systems dynamics. In this month's edition, Glenda Eoyang reflects on*
EMERGENT EXPERTISE

A dear friend was curious when I began my journey into chaos and complexity. "Why," she asked, "Would you want to study something you can't control? How can you call it a science?" She is still my friend, and I still struggle to answer her question. I think the answer is enfolded in **emergent expertise**—the goal of our Human Systems Dynamics Professional (HSDP) training program.

Fifty-five people have completed our HSDP training. They came from the Twin Cities, Anchorage, Tel Aviv, Boston, Denton, Sands Point, Hansville, Nevada City, Phoenix, Hartford, and other points around the world. They came seeking to develop a capacity for coping with chaos, and helping their clients do the same.

During 10 days of intensive training, each of them learned new language, shared their challenges, supported others' learning, and found new ways to see and influence the human systems of which they were a part. Did they learn new ways to think and act? Yes. Did they become "experts" in the traditional sense? No.

Why not? The reason is simple. Expertise in the traditional sense is not possible in self-organizing, emergent, and unpredictable environments. If an expert is one who can find the definitive answer, predict the future, control events, answer all questions, and speak the unassailable truth, then human systems dynamics professionals will never be experts.

Human systems are complex adaptive systems, in which an innumerable number of coherent wholes interact with each other and generate system-wide patterns. Over time, the patterns of the whole shape the behavior of each part. Each part—itsself a whole—influences others within and around itself. In these systems, the past is embedded in the present, and the future emerges from the complex interactions of the moment. Expertise, in the sense of absolute certainty, is impossible.

My consulting clients know this. They no longer ask me to predict the outcomes of a planning session. We talk about their goals. We consider their constraints. We name the critical factors, as they anticipate them. We discuss their history of planning and action. We plan interesting and engaging processes for interaction. But we do not predict outcomes. Clients are satisfied with the work I do—some are even ecstatic—not because of my traditional expertise, but because of my **emergent expertise**.

Emergent expertise is what people develop in the course of the Human Systems Dynamics Professional training. Its double meaning reflects the experience of the theory and practice of HSD.

First, **emergent expertise** means expertise in dealing with emergent environments. The tools, methods, and techniques presented and practiced during HSDP training help people see the emerging patterns around them, identify innovative options for action, and take steps to influence the future. This process is iterative, and the expert must remain intentional and creative at every point. Associates who have completed the training apply their **emergent expertise** in a wide range of fields—public health, evaluation, education, human resources, information technology, mediation, entrepreneurship, human resources, management, academia, and many others. **Emergent expertise** is useful anywhere people come together to make shared meaning or take shared action.

The second meaning of **emergent expertise** is perhaps even more powerful, but it often surprises those who are new to HSD. In this sense, one's expertise continues to develop forever. There is no perfect place of knowing and doing that is the ultimate of all possible levels of expertise. There is no ladder to climb. There is no pinnacle to reach. There is no boundary for knowing "all there is to know." By its very nature, expertise in human systems dynamics emerges over time and in context. New theoretical insights come from a wide variety of arts and sciences to inform learning and growth continually. New practical contexts and experiences continue to challenge and inform insights and actions. There is no end. There are always new interesting and challenging questions to ask and opportunities to pursue.

Even outside the bounds of certainty, professionals and their clients need ways to mark and measure emerging expertise. What can one expect from; and how can one find and give evidence of **emergent expertise**? I don't know for sure, but I think these are some of the patterns that are characteristic of the emergent experts I know. They:

- Teach and learn in every interaction.
- Reinforce strengths of self and other.
- Search for the true and the useful.
- Give and get value for value.
- Attend to the part, the whole, and the greater whole.
- Engage in joyful practice.

Don't be surprised if these sound familiar, they are the short list of simple rules for the HSD Institute. They are the patterns that we observe in theory and practice of **emergent expertise**, and they are the competencies that we try to develop as practitioners of **emergent expertise**.

You may already be on your own journey of emergent theory and practice. If you are interested in joining a network of others who can help you launch or continue your journey, please be in touch with us. We would welcome you into the Human Systems Dynamics Professional training of 2007 and the network of HSD Associates. A brochure is attached. Send Julia Wolter (jwolter@hdsinstitute.org) or me a note for more information.

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