



Forum

Adjacent Opportunities: Interacting Ideas

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Over the years, this column has given me a tremendous opportunity to explore emergence and organization within a variety of different organizations. Many of them have been in the realm of social entrepreneurship and many of those dealt with my trials and tribulations around bringing my own social entrepreneurial effort, Entrepreneurs4Change, to life. During the last year, I have had the great pleasure of producing a book that will be coming out in January/February, 2013 from Palgrave Macmillan. It's called, *Creating Good Work: The World's Leading Social Entrepreneurs Help You Build a Healthy Economy*. And true to its title, it does feature some of the world's leading social entrepreneurs. But I'm not taking the space here to write about it for purely merchandising reasons. What occurred during the production of this book was incredibly emergent and I think worth sharing.

In asking these 20 odd folks to contribute to this book, and some of them, I must say, were very odd, something rather emergent happened. While there was no real interaction among the various contributors, what was produced out of the interaction of their thoughts on this topic, within the volume as a whole, I think, will reshape the thinking that guides the extraordinary efforts people are making to build better social enterprises.

The notion that something can emerge from the interaction of static thoughts is fascinating to me. I do realize that this is all just a figment of my own imagination, that because I have interacted with these thought-tomes I have afforded, in my own mind, an emergent way of thinking. But the collective whole of these very individual chapters has created something far greater than its parts. Now, I

am fully aware that reading a book can be a transforming experience, but in this case, it feels like something a bit different. These people all wrote their ideas in the sanctity of their own writing places. If they're like me sanctity is certainly a relative term. Nonetheless, they produced these chapters and through some alchemical process when the pieces were all dumped into the pot, a golden wisdom far greater than the base metal that went into it, emerged.

I know others will be the judge of whether my sense of this is true or not. That is the world of being a writer—other people get to decide if you're worth the reading or not. But the notion of the life of ideas interacting on their own to create something wholly other is one I've never experienced before, and I do accept that on the plane we call reality this is a complete artifact of my over pressed brain. But I think not. Oops, one has to be very careful with that phrase—that's the old joke—Rene Descartes walks into a bar and the bartender says, "ah, monsieur Descartes, monsieur Descartes, how good to see you. Will it be the usual? And Descartes replies, "I think not." And disappears.

It could be that what I am experiencing will disappear and is as illusionary as the existence of our thinking, but perhaps there's something else that takes place here. Like the shoemaker who awakens to find all the shoes repaired, perhaps ideas do have an emergent life that takes place even if they are not collectively being thought. I suspect this is a similar sort of madness to thinking that paintings hung in a museum somehow interact when no one is there. I would pose (an artistic expression if you will allow, and even if you won't) that a room that is hung with paintings with a certain care, does produce an ambiance that is greater than the parts. But then, of course, I can hear the shrieks, it takes a perceiver to sense that ambient feeling. That's true, but is the ambiance present if the perceiver is not in the room or is the feeling only afforded by the perceiver who enters the room with his or her own raging perceptions?

This is the kind of argument that makes my Step-Father crazed. I can hear him telling me I can't make these assumptions. It is all human derived. I do know one thing, I did nothing to the ideas that were turned into me beyond collecting and ordering them. What emerged was purely a factor of the collection not of my intervening in how or what they were or how they were stated. Now, the scream is louder, it is the perceiver who created the emergence of the collection. The book was just the affordance. But like hearing the proverbial tree falling in the woods, the sound was made whether it was heard by our ears or not. I realize too that if there is any shift in perception of those within the social entrepreneurial industry, it will have an added impact on what occurred when these pages were mixed together. But what arose as a whole when the final word was put in place could never have been predicted by the arrival of the first chapter.

Perhaps we should be careful what books we place together in our libraries. Perhaps we are creating all kinds of new interactive emergent occurrences that are causing great consternation in the world of ideas. There may be something

to this. Have you ever walked into a library where the books were scattered higgledy-piggledy without any order. It feels jarring to the senses, even though the ambient pleasure of the whole can be most pleasing.

Alright, you'll have to wait until January to tell if I'm truly off my nut here or perhaps not, since those of you who know me, may have already had your suspicions. No one, however, can say this collection of ideas doesn't radiate on its own. I think you will all be as surprised as I was.