

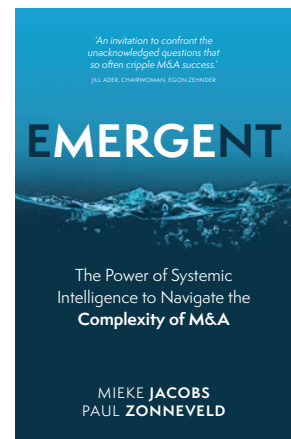
Emergent: The Power of Systemic Intelligence

A book excerpt by Mobius Transformational Faculty Members Paul Zonneveld and Mieke Jacobs

Paul Zonneveld and Mieke Jacobs lead the track Systemic Intelligence and Organizational Constellations at the 2019 NPI. Both have worked with organizations around the world for many years, researching the impact of systemic dynamics, entanglements and traumatic events on large organizations and top teams (as a result of restructuring, mergers and acquisitions, executive leadership transitions, fraud, accidents, transfer of ownership, etc.)

What they have discovered is that navigating complex organizational challenges with systemic intelligence, using the principles and interventions from constellation work, leads to profound breakthroughs.

The full title of their just-published book is *Emergent: The Power of Systemic Intelligence to Navigate the Complexity of M&A* (Rethink Press, 2019). While the founding spark of this beautifully written and compelling guide, was indeed the authors' work within the context of mergers and acquisitions, the result is a book that goes far beyond. *Emergent* is a masterful resource for any complex business challenge where instead of fighting symptoms, you might discover and work with what the writer Clarissa Pinkola Estés calls 'El río abajo el río' – the river underneath the river.



LOOKING AT ALL PARTIES WITH SYSTEMIC INTELLIGENCE *Excerpt from Chapter 3*

Systemic dynamics are the invisible winds that blow through a company. Sometimes they give a team wings to enable its members to fly. More often, though, they feel like a storm roaring on to the shore, deciding what needs to be destroyed along the way. That is why thinking, working, leading and being systemically aware is a much more effective way to reveal the patterns and underlying connections in an organizational system.

Systemic intelligence ...

- Surfaces the roots of seemingly intractable 'stuckness', illogical resistance to change, persistent roadblocks and disappointing results.
- Offers a way of living where you relentlessly strive to understand the whole, the parts and their interdependencies. You are always willing to consider the upsets and challenges as symptoms of something you might not see yet and you are eager to unravel the real maze. You consider your own place and role in the system.

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In practical terms, it implies that you apply the Four Systemic Principles (see table) and their many manifestations as a lens for learning and understanding.

- Summarizes accumulated wisdom, gathered over many years in the domain of constellations and systemic work.

What follows is a non-exhaustive list of what it means for us to journey through life – whether it is the corporate world, our own family, community or society – with systemic intelligence.

1. It starts with ‘seeing systems’

We are not talking about an advanced operating system or any other technical software or set-up. Rather, a system is any set of interacting or interdependent entities forming an integrated whole. Those interdependencies are often happening on an unconscious level and are therefore invisible. A system is subject to natural principles or laws. It attempts to maintain its integrity and restore its dynamic balance by making corrections to realign with internal and external forces.

If the system is not achieving its purpose, instead of pushing it even harder, we need to become really curious to understand what is going on with the interacting parts. Systems simply don’t tolerate ‘moving on’, ‘forgetting’ or ‘excluding’. They will employ correcting mechanisms and entanglements until the real issues are attended to.

Nothing works in isolation. All elements in an organization – people, departments, process steps or product characteristics – are visibly and invisibly connected to each other. Systems are not simply defined by their elements, but by the relationships between them. Understanding and influencing the interrelations is critical to achieving the desired outcome. If the outcome is not what you intended, you need to explore the entire system and the underlying dynamics, not just fight the symptoms.

2. It’s not about knowing; it’s about navigating

An experienced sailor will have planned their journey to the last detail. They will have all their parameters set before they raise the sails and head into the direction of their destination. But then the current throws them off track. The current in a river or an ocean is invisible, fast, strong and unpredictable. It is also what will carry you to ride the waves, if you find it and respect it.

The systemic principles of Purpose, Connection and Inclusion, Order and Occupying one’s place, and Exchange can be used to scan the horizon. [These principles are covered in-depth in a subsequent chapter, which has been excerpted in the *Mobius Strip* Fall 2018 Edition]. They will help you to check all sounds on the ship (your organization) for subtle shifts, be the compass that keeps you on course to constantly navigate in unknown waters and support you in defining the next ‘first step’ when the direction of the wind changes.

FOUR PRINCIPLES OF SYSTEMIC INTELLIGENCE

1) **Purpose:** What is the true purpose or desired outcome of this effort, initiative, or even relationship?

2) **Connection and inclusion:** Have I considered not just the obvious, but all the people involved?

3) **Order:** What is the “natural order” of each player? To begin to examine this conceptually, ask yourself: what are the different ways to organize each of the parts and players?

4) **Exchange:** Is there a reciprocity, a balance of give and take, between each of the parts and players?

For more on the Four Principles, see page 15 of the *Mobius Strip* Fall Supplement 2018 Edition.

It is not easy to step out of the cycle of analyzing, predicting, planning, launching, implementing and executing. Many companies operate in high-risk industries where risk management, scenario planning and full control of critical processes are vital for their license to operate. We are not suggesting you let go of that, but that you are willing to let go of your inner protocol, your assumptions about how things are supposed to go. The strategy that worked to fight the same battle last time will not necessarily work now.

3. Perpetuum mobile

It is a dynamic world; the optimal solution will often be outdated before we have even implemented it. You might have a detailed plan in mind, but it is more important to take the first step and experience how the organization reacts to it, process the impact, understand what to conclude from it about your initial assumptions and the interconnections, and adjust your next move accordingly.

If you are leading a large organization, there is a need for stability – ‘consistency to purpose’ as one of our clients called it. Employees express a need to understand the direction, buy into the tactics and stick to the plan, at least for a while. At the same time, there is also a need to shift to a ‘failing fast’ culture. In these VUCA times, it poses a real risk to hold on to outdated plans.

4. See both the forest and the trees

A company is a multi-layered, tangled web of many systems. To start detangling this complex mix of systems, interconnections and dynamics, it is essential to identify the relevant system for a specific challenge or problem. One of the most important qualities in systemic intelligence is to be able to discern what belongs where. There is good news if you are willing to let go of the desire to intellectually master complexity and use all your additional senses and innate resources.

5. Stop talking and use your senses

In our combined forty-five-plus years of experience in industry, consulting and coaching, we have both come to realize that our road to higher clarity is characterized by letting go of whatever is redundant. Endless spreadsheets with analysis, theoretical discussions, intellectual frameworks and models, and many hours

of talking are unnecessary when you listen for core language; when you look for the river beneath the river; or when you create a visual representation of the situation and let it reveal the dynamics that are masked by the problems on the surface.

CASE STUDY: TABLEAU VIVANT

We ended a diagnostics day with a ‘constellation’, a felt experience of the real dynamics. We positioned an object that represented the change program in the middle of the room and asked each of the different team members to represent one group of critical stakeholders and find their position in relation to the change program.

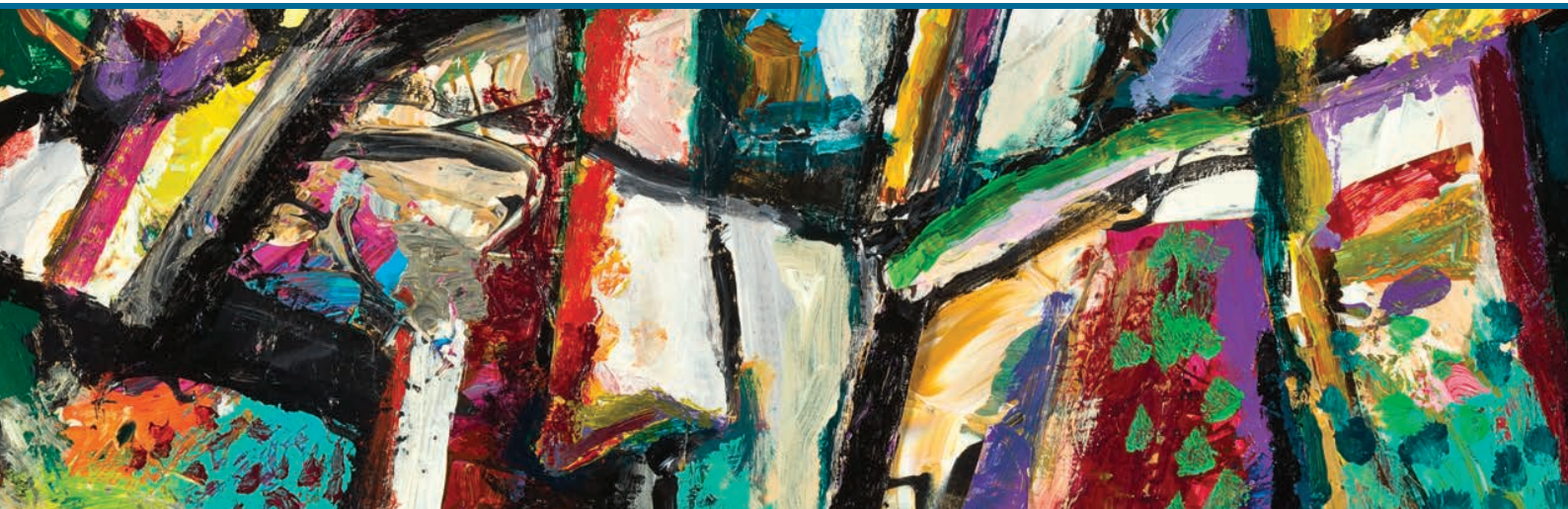
The tableau vivant was revealing. Where one department was almost standing on top of the object, their attention focused on nothing else, other departments were observing from a distance, sitting on the floor or even standing on the table, looking down at it. The constellation showed us a disjointed system with a broken chain of command and a disparate layer of middle management, which explained the employees’ contrasting opinions and beliefs about the transformation ahead.

All participants confirmed afterwards that this half hour had been most impactful and opened their eyes to the real dynamics. It gave them a different perspective on what to do next, which led to a much more integrated tactical implementation plan.

In our work with executive leaders or integration teams, we often use constellation techniques both as a diagnostic tool and as an intervention method.

6. Less is more

Letting go of redundancy also applies to the actions, solutions or interventions you identify. As you are operating on a deep level, a small intervention will have a big impact. For example, you may have tried to engage the acquired organization’s employees many times with big communication campaigns, town-hall meetings, extra incentives or bonuses, but they still reject the new reality. Finding out the origins of the rejection might show you that it only requires a relatively small intervention to bring them on board. After an M&A, the acquiring partner sometimes simply needs to acknowledge that this acquisition date is not just another



snapshot on their timeline; that this acquired partner, additional business unit, site or bunch of employees did not just fall from the sky.

7. The system is stronger than the individual

What any living system wants to achieve is survival. To do so, it will restore harmony on a deeper level even if that means creating what may look like destructive dynamics.

What does it feel like when there is harmony and energy flowing in an organization? Employees are excited about the company vision, results are visible, people go the extra mile to achieve a stretch target. Innovative ideas are welcomed, turnover and absenteeism are low, there are opportunities for growth and personal development, teams are collaborating towards one common goal.

Most probably, you know the opposite situation all too well. But what may look like the disturbing behavior of individuals or groups, what may sound like mutiny or feel broken and dysfunctional, can be the symptoms of a restoring mechanism.

How often do organizations remove individuals who are considered uncooperative only for the next opposer to stand up and demonstrate the exact same behavior? What if those organizations were to consider their employees' opposition as a warning signal? A symptom of something more fundamental, something that we do not yet see?

8. In the beginning, there was nothing

It is critical to honor the origins and understand the history of an organization. We are talking about the

intention or desire that preceded the actual conception – the innovative spark; the brilliant or creative idea; the insight or burning ambition to change something or add value; the determination to improve. What defines the color and culture of this first version of the company is a willingness to manifest the founding idea and take the risk that comes with it.

In our work with M&As, we will always include the timeline of both parties to fundamentally understand milestones that marked their growth or identity shifts, and by doing so we'll honor what can add value going forward.

WHAT IT TAKES

Embracing all of these ideas requires some new competencies from you as a leader or advisor. This is not just another model or analytical tool; it's an attitude with a set of skills, beliefs, mindsets and behaviors that, once embraced, will keep evolving and expanding into uncharted territory. We will outline here what it requires from leaders, change champions, program managers, facilitators and consultants. This is a list that we keep extending along the way.

It demands a new way of listening

If you have ever seen movies of Dan Brown's books, starring Tom Hanks in the role of Professor Robert Langdon, you might remember that the professor has an eidetic or photographic memory. In the movie scenes where he is using this, it's portrayed as if letters, words or symbols are jumping out, forming a new combination in front of his eyes and giving him the hidden answer.

In a way, this image illustrates systemic listening.

“What may look like disturbing behavior, what may sound like mutiny, can be the symptoms of a *restoring* mechanism in the system.”

As you can imagine, after many years of working on and listening for the impact of M&As, we have both developed an M&A ‘sixth sense’. In this book, we will offer you systemic questions to help you listen out for different words and statements. When you learn to listen using all your senses, there is no going back. You will start seeing systems and systemic alerts everywhere.

The more you pay attention, the more you will notice that some words or sentences almost seem to have another color. We call this core language. Which words or sentences stay with you or seem out of place? Those are the clues and cues you need to become aware of, pick up and pursue.

Deal with ambiguity and not knowing

Everyone is tempted to use their knowledge and hard-won wisdom, but we will sometimes ask you to let go of everything you know and be open to a new possibility. We want to invite you to walk into a familiar field with genuine curiosity and trust what the system is telling you. There is no one-size-fits-all manual. The Four Systemic Principles are reconfirmed again and again as universal principles in living systems, but their actual manifestation in each situation requires a closer look, the willingness to be surprised. We have to relate to every new system, to every team and leader again and again as if it is the first time.

Remember that you have a body

We tend to think of our brain as the magical tool for observation, analysis, processing and decision making, but our physical analysis instrument includes our whole body.

Our body is a refined instrument that will give us much more information if we are willing to tune it on a regular basis and listen to its sounds and resonance. Systemic work requires full presence, body awareness, increased perception and observational skills, and what we call embodied wisdom. Pay attention to your own and other people’s energy levels, bodily sensations, movements, breaths or sighs. Goosebumps might tell you that you are on to something; a lurch of the stomach may urge you to better understand the source of tension in the room. Being totally exhausted at the end of a full day of integration work is perhaps an indication of the lack of vitality in the team, and by extension in the entire organization. Without jumping to conclusions or interpreting these additional indicators, learn to trust them and pause your team on a regular basis so they can observe what is happening. Your brain will still get a seat at the table, but so will your entire nervous system.

SYSTEMIC FACILITATION

Excerpt from Chapter 8

The attitude of the facilitator

To be a masterful systemic facilitator is to recognize in which systems we are operating and know our own systemic entanglements. The first system we get to know is the one we are born into: our family system. Pretty early on in life we become part of other systems (extended family, school, sport teams, community, early career paths, etc.) and we typically don’t need long to understand what it takes to belong.

SYSTEMIC FACILITATION GUIDELINES	
Take good care of yourself	You can only assure a high-quality presence when you are safeguarding your own wellbeing, energy level and boundaries. This is intense work. There have been many occasions in the past when we flew into a city late at night to set up the room early the next morning, spent two intense days facilitating an executive team, then ran out at the end of the two days to catch the plane to another country and another setting. Those days are mostly over. We feel an obligation to the people we are inviting into this field to show up rested and ready.
Let go of the desire to perform	It is not about you; you are serving the client's system. Approaching an organization, team, individual, recurrent issue or complex problem with systemic intelligence requires you to let go of your desired outcome, even to let go of everything you think you know. That doesn't mean that you have lost your library of wisdom and experience; it just implies that you are fully present in the moment to experience what wants to happen or be seen now. The quality of your listening deteriorates significantly if you are trying to find clues to a solution, want to be right or come across as smart. Your need to help, fix or find solutions is not so useful. Your willingness to listen, understand, observe, witness, facilitate and resource is.
Take what people say literally, even if just for a moment	We refer to this as 'core language'. Typically, the system or the entanglements of the system are being expressed by the people, often unconsciously, so take what they say literally. Which words stay with you? Are there any statements that seem out of context or exaggerated? Pick them up and mirror them back at the right moment.
Check for permission or agreement	We find it useful to ask at the beginning what a successful first step would be. Maybe your clients only want to get a deeper insight into the situation at this moment. It may be that they want to understand what their next move should be. Respect what you have agreed to. If the opportunity arises to go one step further, check for permission again. Don't push your client unnecessarily. At each step, allow room for each person to pass or express their desire to stop.
Stick to the facts	As much as possible, only ask for facts. Since when? How many? By whom? Who made that decision? Who had the first idea? You're looking for clear, quantifiable facts. Don't allow the person you are interviewing to seduce you with stories and interpretations. Return to the systemic questions whenever you feel you are deviating. As an example, try asking different people in the team to explain the organizational chart to you. If they all come up with a different version, or with an official one and an informal one, you know where to start. If it is difficult for you, as the facilitator, to get clarity, that may be a first indication of confusion in the system.
Don't drown in the team's stories	Some facilitators have a stronger tendency to lean into people's stories than others. Be aware of your own patterns. Be aware of what happens in your body when you interview the client. Your body is wise and gives you signals about important remarks or references to critical events, but it requires practice and dedication to pick up those clues. As one of our teachers would say, 'Sit with your back against a tree.' Facilitate from that symbolic position.
Give direct, simple and clear instructions	Clear instructions create a safe environment; everyone understands the format. You are touching on the deep layers of the system during a constellation, which can be really intense, so it's comforting for the people you work with to trust that you, as a facilitator, are holding the structure and the process.
After every intervention, let go of what you know about the system	The system will shift. After every intervention, let go of your image of the system. Be willing to look at it with new eyes. Every next day is a new day, for the people you are leading and for you as a facilitator.
Suggest the team refrains from taking action right away	Often the shift has happened already. Give those waves time to roll out on the beach. As Amy Fox, Mobius' CEO, tends to say at the end of an immersive transformational leadership program, 'In the next thirty days, don't quit your job, don't divorce your spouse, don't sell your house.'

One of the assignments we set for the participants in our longer systemic intelligence and organizational constellation trainings is to write a report about the dynamics in their family system and the parallels they discover in their professional life. The moment their systemic lens is activated, they find it hard not to see these parallels. We consider a path of personal growth as indispensable for the work we are doing. Signing up for a lifelong journey of inner work will help you to become increasingly aware of your subconscious domain, to distinguish your filters, recognize your cognitive biases and your systemic patterns.

When it comes to facilitating systemic work, we have some dos and don'ts. These are summarized in the table on page 92. This is in no way a dogmatic or exhaustive list. You may want to add to it or upgrade it and make it your own.

The knowing field

Rewind to physics lessons in high school, the teacher telling you the definition of a force field – a vector field indicating the forces exerted by one object on another. This force field is there in each contact between two people; in a team; in leaders'

interactions with their people; between a client and a supplier. If we could see it, it would provide us with a lot of information about the interdependencies in a system. What is the nature of the connections? How strong are they? What is the chain of events?

In constellation work, we use the knowing field to identify what is really going on. What are the invisible currents that make us drift away from our purpose? How can we discern between the symptoms and the real dynamics at play? Thinking in terms of a field helps us to move our focus from the problem to the relationship a client has with the problem.

By engaging with the field, we are translating the two-dimensional view on the situation to a three-dimensional perspective. Even asking someone to demonstrate using the water glasses and salt and pepper shakers on the table makes that additional dimension visible.

For us – as leaders, facilitators, consultants and coaches – to connect to that field, we need to go beyond listening and analyzing with our eyes and ears. We use our entire body and the sensitivity of our nervous system to give us additional information and hints about what is really going on and what the next question or next step could be.



PAUL ZONNEVELD Paul has more than 15 years of experience in applying systemic thinking to family and organizational constellations and over 25 years of international business experience. He is an executive coach and a senior member of the transformational faculty with Mobius Executive Leadership. He is the program director and lead trainer for Systemic Coaching and Systemic Intelligence, using organizational complexity and constellation work at various training institutes in Europe. He brings together thought leaders in this field of work and, along with an international group of experts, is pioneering work on trauma in organizations.



MIEKE JACOBS Mieke has 20 years of global manufacturing and industry experience and has been consulting multinational corporations and executive teams in all major industries. She has a passion for people and organizational dynamics, and has acquired additional skills and certifications in the area of Neuro Linguistic Programming, Personal Mastery, Coaching, Systems Thinking, Constellation Work, Neuroscience and Affective Psychology, Somatics and Trauma Therapy and applies these insights and methodologies in her facilitation and transformation work with leaders, teams and organizations. She is a thought leader, a poet and a writer and authored several articles and her first book. She is a passionate keynote speaker and group facilitator in conferences across the globe. Mieke is a Mobius transformational faculty member and executive coach.