Our world is changing in important ways, with increasing complexity, international social media networks, and more critical attention on the changing climate. How can we incorporate these into our thinking and action? Up to now our thinking – the way we understand our world – has been guided by a Newtonian logic, whereby problems are met with solutions in a relatively linear way. However, straight ‘solution thinking’ can limit the system when it emphasizes technical challenges but leaves out subtle social drivers of these complex systems.

In response, a new style of design thinking has emerged, represented by Imagineering, which offers new ways to generate knowledge. At the core of Imagineering, and other new models, is a ‘dynamic agency’ – the agents, together, generate new order in the system. Whereas Newtonian thinking tends to emphasize reductionism through analysis, these dynamic models offer a different path, a path of up-building and connecting that helps organizations and social systems. For students who have been taught reductionism as the key method for coping with problems, Imagineering and Generative Emergence open opportunities to think and act in a more nuanced way. These complement a Newtonian approach, offering ways to integrate complex social systems into natural systems, combined with a personal awareness of this process.

The drivers of these models are fully consistent. In Imagineering Collective Creativity generates new synergies, as a group of people collectively envision and enact a new idea. In Generative Emergence (Lichtenstein, 2014), a parallel approach is offered – a ‘cycle of order creation’ – and tangible examples show how each step in the cycle can be produced. Another dynamic model is Effectuation (Sarasvathy, 2001), which shows how an entrepreneur’s resources and enactments can generate emergences. Another, Self-organization, explains how far-from-equilibrium dynamics can transform social systems. All of these models turn on how our agency can generate truly unique emergences. All of these models incorporate non-linearity, non-predictability, and distributed agency for explaining and enacting new order.

These dynamic models are emerging at a critical moment in our society. Globalization demands new methods of organizing; moreover, the range of stakeholders and the growth in value chains now extend around the entire world. In the short term we are seeing the emergence of more autocratic and nationalist governments, requiring new ways to invigorate more democratic thinking. In a broader sense, 20th-century economics and trade has made it possible for so many people to purchase so many products; so much so that
the earth itself is becoming damaged by the success of this growth-oriented Newtonian worldview. A goal of these new models is to provide an alternative that can complement these mainstream approaches, and thus create a wider range of useful ideas.

How can we characterize these new models? Overall, their main driver is order creation. One could say the goal of these models is to increase the capacity of the system, to extend its capabilities beyond what individuals might expect on their own. In Collective Creativity, for example, the new capacity for group-level creativity opens up whole new layers of insight, inspired solutions and innovations. Order creation is also expressed by the resulting positive change and organizational innovation.

Another characteristic is visioning: these models help us dream of new possibilities. They support John F. Kennedy’s claim for people ‘who can dream of things that never were and ask, “Why Not”?.’ Generative Emergence starts by envisioning the system in a new way, and to imagine innovation across organizations and systems. Imagineering develops a collective – the distributed creativity of the many – to see something new in the old, sparking them to improve their reality.

Overall, our work is for empowering those brave souls who dare to dream, those who dare to leave the beaten path for a more effective one. May this book provide insight and guidance on that path, and may it provide a powerful step in your own journey.

Reference