

THE JOURNAL OF BUSINESS AGILITY

emergence

Leading Through the Fog



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I'm Christopher Ruz, writing to you from the sunny southern coast of Australia. At this moment, we're in the final days of editing the first Emergence issue of 2023, and let me tell you: in the course of creating this issue, I've heard every possible fog metaphor under the sun.

Fog is VUCA. Fog is individual, mental, emotional. Fog is structural. Fog is internal. We are all cars on a busy highway navigating the fog. We are the highway. We are the fog!

Are these interpretations in conflict? Hardly. In fact, they've all been deeply educational, and have broadened my understanding in ways I never could have anticipated. These diverse perspectives on what constitutes fog in the 21st century all serve to illuminate the issue from different directions... and when the fog is closing in, you need as many flashlights as you can muster to map out the route forward.

Like you, our readers, and the organizations you work with, Emergence has also been in a state of transition these past years. We're a team spread across many continents, working through challenges I'm sure you're already deeply familiar with. Inside Emergence, roles are always shifting to account for needs. Two years ago I was an occasional contributor, helping authors polish and deliver their insights. Now I'm the Editor-in-Chief and have been given an incredible opportunity to meet, work and grow alongside a host of talented thinkers and doers. The path forward isn't always obvious, but our community is a gift; there's always someone close at hand to educate, instruct, and uplift when visibility gets low. Every new perspective

I encounter is a lantern floating in the fog, guiding me onwards.

Will I ever accumulate enough knowledge, enough collective wisdom to burn away the fog entirely? Unlikely. Fog is relentless. It dissipates only briefly, leaving us clutching at our maps and compasses... and at each other.

Perhaps that's the hidden gift that fog provides. It forces us to turn to one another and say, "What now?" We put our heads together. We share deep learnings and mash them into new processes, insights, tools, pathways. We create communities bound by common purpose.

Then we link hands and, together, take one big step into the unknown.

And another.

And another.

Thank you for continuing to read and support Emergence. I hope this issue helps illuminate your own path. And remember—when the fog closes in, turn to those around you. When we unite and collaborate, we can always chart a route to success.



Christopher Ruz

Editor-in-Chief

Welcome



Pete Behrens
Guest Editor

Not being able to see is one of my biggest fears. Often as a child I imagined what it would be like to lose my sight; closing my eyes and trying to get somewhere or accomplish a task. I have a ton of respect and empathy for those who navigate our world with limited visibility or in complete darkness.

Data journalist and TED Talk speaker David McCandless explains that, among the five senses, sight is the most capable of gathering information; sight collects ten times more data than touch and 100 times more than hearing, smell and taste. But more importantly, the data that enters our brain vastly outpaces our conscious bandwidth to process it. In fact, our conscious brain only consumes approximately 0.01% of the total data generated by our senses.

What does this mean?

As leaders operating in today's global business landscape, we are typically navigating with little to no visibility due to the incredible speed of change and the vast complexity of technological advances. While we often refer to this through the acronym VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity), I prefer to use a more visual metaphor of fog.

Unlike my childhood experiments of closing my eyes (where I was in control of how fast I stumbled around my bedroom), today's business leaders don't have that same command of their environment. The speed of modern business, combined with advancing technology and a constantly shifting competitive landscape, means leaders are driving high speed over an unknown landscape in dense fog. The ability to set direction and make pivotal decisions in real time, especially when data is in limited supply, is unnerving at best and scary at worst.

So, that leads me to a few questions that I have been grateful to explore with some of my favorite collaborators. *What makes some leaders more successful than others navigating the fog of business—courage, caution, gut instinct, or something else? What makes some organizations more successful than others in the fog of business—diversity, flexibility, agility or otherwise?* The authors and the articles they share in this edition were curated because of the diverse landscape they explore. They were encouraged to share both personal experiences and organizational insights to help each of us better navigate in the fog.

What is most impressive to me about the collection of authors and stories we curated for this issue of Emergence is that they have expanded the fog metaphor beyond the typical description of VUCA. The authors expose a complexity in the landscape more broadly and deeply than I ever imagined. They also illustrate how the fog blocking our view is not only external to us, it is also within us! Just as when the car windows fog up and block our view, an internal fog can build up from cognitive biases and blindspots, limited development and growth, and through experiences of trauma.

The authors we collected and the stories they share for this edition were chosen to help you as a reader better see, understand, and navigate this diverse landscape. My hope is that by reading through this collection of articles, you will have a deeper understanding, appreciation and respect for the challenges we all face, empathy for your colleagues on this shared journey, and tools to take on your own.



Who's Who?

I shared with the editing team my discomfort with the traditional lead-in to introducing each article included in this edition and I was excited when they encouraged a twist. Thus, rather than introducing the article, I'd rather introduce the authors and why I felt honored they chose to join me on this shared journey.



Luke Hohmann is one of the first leaders I met when I stepped out on my own as an independent consultant in 2005. Not only did he invite me to his company's offsite, he personally picked me up from the airport, invited me to his home, introduced me to his beautiful family, and treated me like an equal. I have come to admire Luke as a creative thinker, inventor, author, and entrepreneur. I have learned a lot just by following his taillights as he is way ahead of most of us in this fog. Thank you Luke for your courage to lead.



I first met **Amjed Al-Zoubi**, CIO of Amerisure, through my engagement as a trainer and coach in 2018. However, I have come to know him more as a human being in our shared collaboration in telling the story of their organization's four-year innovation journey. Sometimes we fail to see the human behind the title, especially when the title includes a "C" in it. I love how he shared his love for Michigan football and his role as a father to his story! Thank you Amjed for your courage to share.



Rachel Weston Rowell, SVP of Product and Technology at Insight Partners, is one of my favorite people in the world! While Rachel and I shared a passion for teaching and coaching agile teams and leaders, I have come to admire Rachel through our shared interest as entrepreneurs. I continue to borrow her quotes like "*Don't push boulders uphill*," and, "*The role of leader is to serve, AND the role of servant is to lead.*" When Rachel talks about decision making as she offers here, listen! She is likely the most think-on-your-feet savvy person I have ever met—just catch her at an improv show to see for yourself. Thank you Rachel for your courage to explore.



Through almost two decades of consulting, I have met thousands of leaders. Yet, few stick out like the leader of **Team Software**, who has asked to remain anonymous as he feels his achievements should be attributed to and shared by his team of passionate developers. I first met him in 2008 and we later collaborated when he was managing a software lab at a major global manufacturing company. He's a leader who manages to balance ego with humility in a way that is both inspiring and engaging! Many of my leadership stories are inspired by his willingness to experiment with his own leadership, including in this article where he engaged his entire team in the writing process. Thank you to this leader (and Team Software) for your courage to experiment.



Few thought leaders have been more influential on my practice than **Bill Joiner**, author of *Leadership Agility*. I was first introduced to Bill's work on my personal MBA journey on leadership and culture in 2009. However, having come to know Bill and his wife Debra personally, I discovered that they walk their talk and have been catalysts in our community as a mentor, trainer, coach and partner. Thank you Bill for your mentorship.



I was privileged to work with **Wendy Ryan**, CEO of Kadabra and author of *Learn Lead Lift*, when she joined me on Agile Leadership Journey's *(Re)Learning Leadership* podcast to not only discuss her work, but also vulnerably shared her personal story of trauma and how that impacts identity in the workplace. I couldn't think of a better person to help us learn more about the fog of trauma and how our life experiences influence our leadership. Thank you for rising up again.



In 2016, **Kirill Kilmov**, an independent organizational consultant, invited me to Kiev, Ukraine to teach a leadership program. Meeting Kirill and his team changed the course of my teaching philosophy forever. The graphical facilitation techniques and learning through visualization philosophy utilized in Agile Leadership Journey's curriculum today were inspired by them. However, reconnecting with Kirill for this edition was tied to his unfortunate circumstance of living and working through the conflict of war with Russia. Kirill sheds light on how that war is affecting people on the ground. Thank you Kirill for having the vulnerability to share.



Stephen Lorking, a strategic leader with Domino Printing, is one of those students who surprised me. Oftentimes as teachers we don't see the impacts of our teaching, yet the seeds still get planted. So it's beautiful when those seeds grow and we are able to admire them. For the past five years, Stephen has been one of those leaders who stepped into a catalyst role to grow personally as a leader and to lead his organization on a journey. He shares that story with us here. Thank you Stephen for having the courage to change.



I was first introduced to **Christina Carlson**, an independent leadership coach and a valued Guide in our Agile Leadership Journey Community, through another member of our community. She's a female leadership trainer and coach navigating a male-dominated industry. Christina continues to navigate the fog of gender bias in the workplace and the double-bind female leaders face to be respected and heard in male-biased cultures. Thank you Christina for having the courage to challenge.



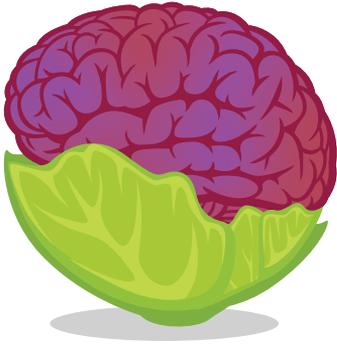
Last, and certainly not least, is **Sal Silvester**, author and executive coach with 5.12 Solutions. While Sal is one of the most recent influencers I have met, it wasn't due to a lack of trying. A leader we both have coached in common had been trying to get us together for many years. Finally, we made that happen and now I'm sorry that it took so long. Sal and I might be brothers from a different mother with shared interests as trainers, coaches, podcasters, story tellers, cyclists, and lovers of whiskey. Sal shares his personal harrowing and vulnerable story of survival in the mountains. Thanks Sal for inspiring us.

I hope you enjoy the journey as much as I have in helping bring it together. ©

Pete Behrens

Guest Editor

Founder & Coach, Agile Leadership Journey



Food for Thought

PETE BEHRENS

Fog is a metaphor I have come to value for its unique characteristics. Unlike other weather events, fog cannot be dealt with. Rain can be wiped away. Snow can be pushed and neutralized with sand. And ice can be melted. But fog is elusive. Not only does fog permeate everything, it cannot be pushed, blown, wiped or neutralized. Fog must be navigated.

While fog is an apt metaphor for the environment faced by any generation looking forward, it is especially true for today's leaders. Pause for a moment on the last generation. We've experienced a renaissance of technology advances including mobile, social media, streaming, rideshare, and 24x7 connectivity. Social systems are breaking through war, immigration, racial and human rights injustice, guns, police and climate change. The geopolitical systems are stretched to a breaking point by political polarization. And every single person across the globe has lived through one of the most globally unifying (and likely one of the most digitally activating) events since WWII—the COVID pandemic. Oh, and most of the high-tech enabled business world is shifting toward more agile ways of working.

In closing this edition, I want to share a thought with you regarding the desire for a recipe to ease your leadership journey, especially through the fog. While we all love a good recipe, I want you to recognize their place and limitations for your leadership journey. Enjoy!

A Recipe For Change

I recently switched to a whole-food plant-based diet to both improve my health and to help our planet. However, after decades of a traditional meat and dairy-based diet, I had little knowledge or experience in cooking healthy (and flavorful) vegan meals. Cold boring salads were all I knew. I needed help.

To aid my transition, I joined a two-week program allowing me to connect to others on this shared journey and to be guided by experts. And our principal guide was “Dr. Veggie” who ate leafy greens during every Zoom meeting! A bit quirky, but effective. A key component of the program was an entire two week meal plan including recipes and a shopping list, which provided helpful examples of healthy and tasty meals.

I learned during the program that many people who attempt vegan diets often run into problems because they replace their “no” foods with other not-so-great alternatives containing refined grains and sugars—it simply shifts the problem rather than fix it. So the recipes helped shape the boundaries and provide clear direction, especially for people like me who were new to this foreign landscape.



Shuhari—Moving Past Recipes

As a Certified Scrum Trainer (CST) with the Scrum Alliance for 10 years, I became a fan of *Shuhari*, a Japanese martial arts concept loosely translated as *follow the rules, break the rules, transcend the rules*. We trained ScrumMasters to use Shuhari for both personal development of their new role and in developing their teams and organization in learning and applying Scrum.

Through *Shuhari*, you follow the recipes until you become accustomed to and deeply understand the rules behind them—how and why they are in place. Only after that deep understanding can you break from the recipes and experiment with new approaches.

This is how effective ScrumMasters and agile coaches can adapt the principles and practices around Scrum to mature effective organizations. As an agile coach myself I was fortunate to collaborate with the Salesforce leadership team early in their transition to a high-performing company. We effectively broke free from the traditional recipes of Scrum and Kanban to birth an incredible wave of productivity which is still going strong after 15 years (More on this story in an upcoming edition of *Emergence*)¹.

Another example of breaking from recipes was Spotify, as beautifully portrayed by Henrik Kniberg in the Youtube videos on Spotify's Culture². An interesting, and somewhat sad, twist to this story is that the video series became so trendy that *Spotify Culture* became its own recipe, much to the chagrin of Kniberg who insisted others only use it as a reference data point rather than a recipe. He further shared that the videos illustrate only one point in time, and that the videos became outdated soon after their release.

The Problem with Recipes

Kniberg recognized something most people miss—recipes can be reckless, especially when applied to a business culture context. Let's take a look at one of the biggest recipe mistakes of the business world over the past 40 years!

In 1982, Tom Peters and Robert Waterman of McKinsey published what has become one of the most influential business books of all time: *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies*. The authors analyzed 43 top-performing US-based companies and abstracted a recipe for success called the 7S Framework: strategy, structure, systems, staff, skills, style and shared values³.

Since that time, a slew of researchers have sought to do the same, analyzing companies and abstracting the recipes which drove high-performance. In 1994 Jim Collins and Jerry Porras released their six-year analysis and patterns of 18 successful companies in *Built to Last*, with special focus on enduring performance characteristics.

The leadership education and development over the past 40 years has been built on a generation of heavily researched companies and their recipes of success. Yet to what end?

Richard D'Aveni, professor of strategic management at Dartmouth's Tuck School of Business, questioned the science behind the "traits of successful companies" genre, and others followed.

In 2006, Scott Keller and Colin Price of McKinsey analyzed their research data along with performance data over the following decade for their book *Beyond Performance*. They found that of the identified excellent companies showcased in the books listed above, 20% no longer existed, 46% were struggling, and only 33% remained as high performers.

Just as in baseball, batting 330 is a terrific stat. However, in 2007, Phil



Rosenzweig in his book *The Halo Effect* further exposed the pseudoscientific tendencies of building recipes by analyzing business performance at its peak. He exposes many delusions these researchers suffered, including correlation versus causality, using a single explanation to connect an outcome, and connecting winning dots while ignoring the losing ones. Selective data at best, malpractice at worst.

No one is questioning that the companies researched for these books were, at one time, high-performing. A number of them were indeed built to last! However, what has become clearer with time is that developing recipes based on their collective success is flawed. Yet leaders continue to follow these flawed recipes.

It's time for a new recipe.

A Recipe for Today?

We are coming up on two decades since Keller, Price and Rosenzweig shattered the “traits of successful companies” research genre. So much has changed since then. Our landscape has fogged over. So not only were the recipes of the past wrong, we must ask: is there any recipe that might help lead through the foggy, fast-paced landscape of today's business environment?

We have a few clues to assist us. First, recipes help. Second, recipes are only a starting point. With that in mind, let's heed the advice from some experts to help us build a new recipe.

Keller and Price determined that much of the failure to sustain a high-performance culture was an excessive bias toward a static view of managing performance. In short, recipes that build success are not sufficient to sustain success through disruptions.

Bill Joiner, author of *Leadership Agility*, explains that the recipe for leadership success is agility. Not capital “A” Agile, but small “a” agility. Leadership agility means leaders who are more aware and actively choose in the moment. In other words, the recipe is to inspect and adapt. Just like Scrum.

Adam Grant, author of *Think Again*, says the recipe for today's leaders is to think like a scientist. This means shifting from knowledge we use to preach, prosecute and politic as if it were “right” to a scientific mindset that learns what is “right” through hypothesis, experimentation and data gathering. Once again, this points us to an inspect-and-adapt approach.

And Brene Brown, author of *Dare to Lead*, shares the recipe for today's leaders as the courage to be vulnerable. That means having the courage to step away from what you know and be open to what you don't know. Vulnerability to not having an answer, to even asking the question. Again, inspect and adapt.

Maybe I am suffering a similar fate to Peters and Waterman and believing I can postulate a recipe from successful authors of our time. However, it appears to me that when the data points begin to cluster, it means something. Am I just connecting the winning dots? Am I adding causality in correlated data? You be the judge.



I wish I had a clear, easy-to-follow recipe for you to follow as a leader. Instead, the recipe I have in mind will be hard to follow, and it may lead to some failure. In fact, I am *sure* it will lead you to failure.

But that's the point. We learn best through failure. We need the courage to try when failure is an option.

New

A Recipe for Leading in the Fog

Ingredients

- Education
- Experimentation
- Data
- Coaching



Steps

1. **Lead yourself first**—people do not follow leaders unable to manage themselves.;
2. **Set and track goals**—objectives help us know what is important and what to say “no” to;
3. **Focus, Focus, Focus**—do a few things well and let others do the rest;
4. **Inspect and adapt**—stay curious, experiment, observe and continue to learn and grow; and
5. **Celebrate!**—pause frequently to recognize your progress, and the people that helped you get there.

Serves one, but best shared with others.

Dedication

A big “Thank You!” to the Business Agility Institute and Emergence teams for trusting in me to lead the way on this edition and for co-creating with me at every step. A shout out to the contributing authors I have come to know and respect over my career for the courage to write and share their stories. And a grateful bow to my Agile Leadership Journey team for their creativity and steadfast dedication to building a world-class organization.

This edition would not have been possible without each and every one of you. While others may only see the lone leader in the limelight, it is likely only possible because they are being lifted up by those who work with them.

Enjoy the Journey!

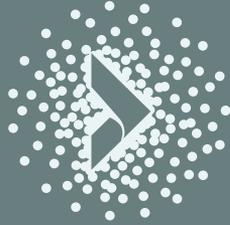
Pete Behrens

Guest Editor

¹ <https://resources.scrumalliance.org/Article/salesforce-an-agile-case-study> and <https://trailridge.team/client-stories/salesforce>

² *Spotify Engineering Culture Part I*: <https://youtu.be/Yvfz4HGtoPc> and *Spotify Engineering Culture Part II*: <https://youtu.be/vOt4BbWLWQw>

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/In_Search_of_Excellence



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