

# **The Phoenix Process**

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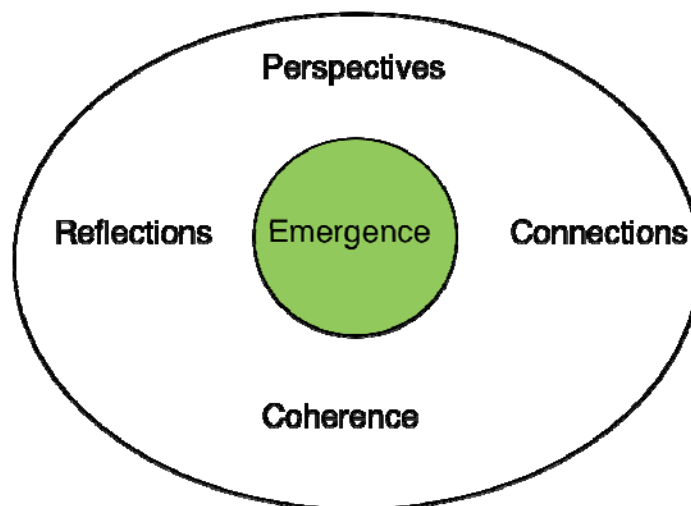
*The Phoenix bird self-immolates and then rises anew from the ashes.  
We too are dissolving many of our old ways of relating in the world,  
and are watching and listening to see what wishes to be born.*

When we confront difficult challenges in our political, environmental, economic, and social systems, we often convene working groups, commissions, or task forces to find solutions. However, as Einstein has said, we cannot solve problems with the same mind that created them.

**The Phoenix Process** is a template for working groups based on a systems understanding of our interconnected world. Using core principles from systems and complexity sciences, it allows a group of disparate voices to inquire deeply into the challenges and opportunities within complex issues and to discover new possibilities and creative approaches.

**The Phoenix Process** involves five areas of inquiry, appropriate when studying any one system or set of inter-related systems. The questions listed here are representative only, not an exhaustive set by any means. They are meant to evoke and even provoke new thinking and creative ideas.

## **The Phoenix Process**



***Perspectives: It All Depends on How You See It (Because human beings are meaning-makers.)***

- What are the stories we tell ourselves about this system?
- What are our most basic assumptions about what is true regarding this system?
- From what worldview or mental model do we make these assumptions?
- What do we learn about this system when we explore it from a diversity of perspectives, representing different positions both internal and external to the system? What voices are missing, and why?
- What do we notice when we step back and look at the system as a larger whole?
- What do we notice when we focus in on the smaller parts of the whole?
- What can we learn from one scale of the system that will help us in dealing with it at another scale?

***Connections: We're All In This Together (Because everything is interconnected.)***

- How is this system connected to other systems?
- Which of those connections are most relevant to our study, and why?
- How are the parts of the system functioning in relation to other parts?
- What is the quality of relationships, internally and externally, and what can be done to improve them?
- Where are the broken connections, and what can be done to mend them?
- Where are the hidden connections, and what can be done to bring them to the surface?
- Where are the strained connections, and what can be done to ease them?
- How can we connect that which is disconnected?
- Where are the opportunities for greater cooperation?

***Coherence: Within Chaos There is Stability (Because systems self-organize.)***

- What are the patterns in the system? Which ones serve its well-being and which do not?
- What are the flows of energy, matter, and information within the system and between the system and its environment? Where is there over-accumulation? Under-accumulation? Blockages? Over-stimulation?
- What are the key memes or other attractors that do or could promote stability?
- What is the degree of resilience in the system?
- What is the degree of rigidity in the system?
- To what extent are the players in the system able to tolerate ambiguity, unpredictability, and change?

***Reflection: You Can't Get There From Not Here (Because living systems are learning systems.)***

- What feedback messages are coming to the system from its environment?
- What feedback messages are coming to the system from within itself?
- What is the system doing with those messages?
- How is the system learning about itself?

- How is the system dealing with its pain?
- How is the system adapting to internal and external changes?
- To what extent are the players in the system grounded in self-awareness?
- To what extent are the players in the system welcoming of different perspectives?
- What are we learning – about ourselves, about the system – from this process?
- What do we know we don't know yet, and how can we learn it?
- How can we apply what we are learning to the system? To other systems?
- So What? What difference does it make?
- Now What? What are our next steps?

***Emergence: The Phoenix is Rising (Because we are the ones we've been waiting for.)***

- What new networks, patterns, phenomena are arising? How do they affect the system?
- Who are the innovators, creative thinkers, and change leaders in this system?
- What are they doing that can be replicated or built upon?
- How can more creativity be encouraged?
- What vision is emerging for how the system can be better and different?
- To what extent is the system viable – in the present and into the future?
- Where is the system along the continuum of preservation and dissolution?
- Where is the system along the continuum of incremental change and transformation?
- What needs to be let go of for the new to be born?
- What can we celebrate?