

Action and reflection: the individual and the collective

The annual American Society for Cybernetics (ASC) conference took place on 1-5 June 2016 in Olympia, WA, and was hosted by Evergreen State College. The proceedings from this conference are presented in this volume of *Kybernetes*, continuing a tradition that has seen this journal publish the proceedings of recent ASC conferences in Troy, NY (Glanville and Sweeting, 2011), Asilomar, CA (Glanville and Griffiths, 2013), Bolton, UK (Glanville *et al.*, 2014), and Washington, DC (Baron *et al.*, 2015), showing the support from both sides in the further dissemination of research in cybernetics.

The aim of the conference was to bring together people from various disciplines providing cross-disciplinary and meta-disciplinary conversations and addressing the relationship between reflection and action. These systemically connected topics were explored from a variety of perspectives and from various contexts, highlighting the way that action and reflection unfold in individuals and groups. The theme complements that of the 2013 ASC conference in Bolton, which explored the cybernetic relationship between acting, learning and understanding (Glanville *et al.*, 2014).

In keeping with the publication tradition of the ASC, a paper publication track was available to those who submitted extended abstracts prior to the conference. The double-blind peer-reviewed abstracts, which were accepted, were then made available in the conference booklet. Full papers were only submitted after the conference with the aim that conferees would reflect on their participation during the conference, achieving new insights into their work, as an extended and less formalised part of the peer review process.

The conversational format of this and previous ASC conferences is a differentiating feature from traditional conferences, allowing participants an opportunity to discuss their ideas and reflections about the conference theme while in community with others and cybernetic ideas to be put into practice within the conference, as well as discussed in it (Glanville, 2011; Sweeting and Hohl, 2015; Richards, 2015; Griffiths and Baron, 2015). In addition to participating in the conversational sessions, authors presented their work to their peers in the scheduled paper presentations. A feature of ASC conferences is the equal weighting given to both the presenter and the audience, with each given equal time for comment in the hope that an environment of conversation may occur. This approach, which can be both rigorous and nerve-racking, usually leads to refinement of one's work owing to the wide scope of comments made from an audience that consists of people who are from diverse contexts and fields of specialisation – a multidisciplinary audience. Presenters may defend their work or embrace the inputs from the audience, but the goal is simply to initiate spontaneous conversations, which the authors can then integrate into their final paper. There is circularity in this approach to publication. The continuous reflection loops that are initiated as part of the conference and publication process are meant to stimulate not only personal reflection but also reflexion – the reflection on one's ideas now embracing the reflection of others' reactions to form a wider system (Glanville, 2013). This additional loop embraces the ideas of others (the cybernetics community) to act as perturbing agents.

After a two-month interval, authors are invited to submit their final paper drafts through the ScholarOne portal. Each paper is subjected to a rigorous double-blind peer review, including the guest editors' reconciliation. The reconciliation, which is also a feature in the ASC publication approach, is meant to assist the author in tying together any divergent peer reviews. Authors are requested to acknowledge reviewers' comments, which are checked by



the guest editors for the adequacy of response to review critiques, keeping in mind that reviewers may also need to be challenged. Finally, the editors, who adjudicate disagreements (often calling in an extra reviewer), proofread the contents for consistency and use of English. This approach to publication was born out of the legacy of Ranulph Glanville and his supportive approach to scholarly publications. In this light, the method that the editorial team follows should also reflect a cybernetic approach: cybernetics is not just a way of thinking, it is also a way of doing. Thus, as the proceedings arise out of the ASC conference, they too need to reflect a cybernetic process. Our aim is to learn together in a circularity of action, reflection and moving forward.

The layout of the material in this special issue follows an alphabetical order. Rather than any attempt at thematic ordering, readers are invited to consult the abstracts to decide their own route through.

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Philip Baron

*Department of Electric and Electronic Engineering, University of Johannesburg,
Johannesburg, Gauteng, South Africa*

David Griffiths

*School of Education and Psychology, The University of Bolton,
University of Bolton Deane Road, Bolton, UK, and*

Ben Sweeting

School of Architecture and Design, University of Brighton, Brighton, UK

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