



## turning managers into leaders

### Merge's Monthly Mega Minute – October 2005

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*Merge Gupta-Sunderji helps turn managers into leaders. Through engaging keynotes and facilitated workshops, she gives people specific and practical tools to achieve leadership and communication success. Contact her at [www.mergespeaks.com](http://www.mergespeaks.com) or 403-605-4756*

### Making order out of chaos: the theory of dissipative structures

If you've ever studied physics, you might recall the 2nd Law of Thermodynamics: namely, the entropy (disorder or chaos of energy and matter) of a system always increases over time. Simply put, what that means is that if a tree falls in a forest, over time, it will decay and disintegrate. Straightforward enough!

That is, until Dr. Ilya Prigogine, originator of the theory of dissipative structures, came along. According to Prigogine, when the energy of a system becomes concentrated enough, it can actually shatter the pre-existing organization. At such revolutionary moments or "bifurcation points", a system has two choices: to either disintegrate into "chaos", or to leap to a new even higher lever of "order". In other words, it is possible for the opposite of the 2nd Law to happen; it is possible for entropy to drastically decrease rather than increase; it is possible for something of even greater strength and complexity to come out of chaos. Radical idea perhaps, but compelling enough to win him the 1977 Nobel prize in Chemistry.

Consider again that tree that fell in the forest. If it falls into a bog and slowly sinks into the earth, the pressure of the earth above concentrates its energy and, over time, turns it into coal. Coal has greater order and complexity than the tree. Turn up the heat and pressure, and coal can turn into diamond of even greater strength and complexity.

As a leader, you will face "bifurcation points", situations in which difficult and multiple decisions need to be made, when the pressure is high, and the consequences of your actions far-reaching. And just as in any system, you will have two choices: to either succumb to the pressure and disintegrate into chaos, or to leap to a new higher level of order and discover even



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greater strength and complexity within yourself. Which choice will you make?