# 0070 Direct Outcomes And Emergent Outcomes

The Summers Principle Book · https://kb.jeffreysummers.com/docs/0070-direct-outcomes-and-emergent-outcomes/

The principle covers two categories of outcomes: direct and emergent. Both trace to design or default, but through different mechanisms, and understanding the difference is what allows the operator to design at the right layer for the right kind of outcome.

Direct outcomes are the immediate result of specific operator choices. The hire made this week produces the cast member who works next week. The dish added to the menu produces the sales, the food cost, and the Guest reaction to that dish. The training session held on Tuesday produces the cast's improved execution on Wednesday. The vendor negotiation held last month produces the cost structure this quarter. Direct outcomes are traceable, in a linear sense, from a specific choice to a specific result.

Direct outcomes are what most operators think about when they think about design. They read design as making better specific choices — hiring better, training better, buying better, pricing better. All true, but incomplete. Design of direct outcomes is one layer of the operator's work. Not the deepest layer.

Emergent outcomes are the ones that develop over time from the interaction of many designed elements plus randomness. The cast culture that forms. The reputation that spreads. The regular clientele that returns. The neighborhood identity the restaurant develops. The signature moves that take root among the cast without anyone explicitly training them. The relationships between specific cast members and specific Guests. These outcomes are not the direct result of any single choice. They emerged from the substrate the operator built.

Emergent outcomes are what makes some restaurants feel alive and others feel manufactured. A restaurant that has been designed only at the direct-outcome layer can execute every specific choice competently and still feel dead — because the emergent layer is defaulted, and whatever emerged from the defaulted substrate is not what the operator would have wanted. A restaurant that has been designed at the substrate layer produces coherent, positive emergent outcomes even on dimensions the operator did not consciously address.

This creates confusion for operators who observe emergent outcomes and cannot trace them to specific choices. They see the culture, the reputation, the regular clientele, and they conclude these outcomes happened by luck, or by charisma, or by right-place-right-time, or by some third cause. They are not any of those. Emergent outcomes trace to the conditions the operator built. Different conditions produce different emergent outcomes. The substrate design is invisible in the specific outcome but present in the pattern.

Consider the cast culture. If the operator has designed the substrate — hiring for a specific character, training on principles rather than scripts, holding accountability tight on the standards that matter, setting the cultural tone in every interaction — a specific cast culture emerges from the interaction of those designed conditions. The operator did not design the specific inside jokes, the specific loyalties, the specific pride the cast takes in specific moves. Those emerged. But they emerged from the substrate the operator built, and if the substrate had been different, different outcomes would have emerged. The specific culture is emergent. The conditions that produced it were designed.

If the operator has not designed the substrate — hires from the pile, trains inconsistently, holds accountability sporadically, sets no cultural tone — a cast culture still emerges. It has to. Cast members interact, norms form, values solidify. But the culture that emerges from the defaulted substrate is whatever the forces available in the absence of design produced. Often it is a culture of low standards, individual survival, and quiet contempt for the operator. The operator did not design this culture. The operator got this culture from the substrate they defaulted on.

Same phenomenon — emergence — producing opposite outcomes. The difference is at the substrate layer, which is where design or default was running.

This is why some interventions at the direct-outcome layer fail. An operator sees the cast culture drifting and tries to fix it with a specific move — a training session, a new policy, a leadership talk. If the substrate is defaulted, the direct intervention produces a brief change and then the defaulted substrate reasserts itself. Because the emergent outcome traces to the substrate, not to the direct intervention. Fixing the substrate produces sustained emergent change. Fixing only the direct-outcome layer produces temporary blips against the underlying pattern.

The operator working at the emergent-outcome layer has to think about what they are building the conditions for, not what specific outcome they want to produce. They cannot design the specific inside joke that will become the cast's signature move. They can design the conditions under which the cast will naturally develop signature moves — autonomy plus standards plus trust plus permission to improvise. Given those conditions, specific signature moves will emerge. Which

ones cannot be predicted. That signature moves will emerge can be.

This is what mature restaurant design looks like. The operator is designing both layers. Direct outcomes on the dimensions they can control specifically. Substrate conditions on the dimensions that produce emergent outcomes. The two layers reinforce each other. Direct outcomes contribute to the substrate over time (each specific hire shapes the culture; each specific dish shapes the reputation). Substrate conditions shape which direct outcomes are possible (the culture determines who wants to work there; the reputation determines who wants to eat there).

The principle governs both layers. Design or default at the direct-outcome layer produces the immediate outcomes. Design or default at the substrate layer produces the emergent outcomes. Both are the operator's work. Both are traceable. Both are subject to the same causal law. The layer changes. The principle does not.

Operators who work only at the direct-outcome layer often plateau. They can execute specific moves well but cannot break through to a next level of restaurant, because the substrate is holding the ceiling. Operators who work at both layers can break through, because they are producing coherent emergent outcomes that reinforce the direct outcomes, and the operation compounds instead of running in place.

The design work at the substrate layer looks different from direct-outcome design work. It is slower to show results. It is harder to measure in the short term. It requires the operator to trust that they are building conditions rather than choosing outcomes. But over multi-year time horizons, substrate design produces the outcomes that most defaulted operators think are impossible — the culture that seems to run itself, the reputation that seems to grow on its own, the clientele that seems to develop from nothing. None of it runs itself. All of it was engineered at the substrate.

The principle applies at both layers. The layer changes. The principle does not.