

contemporary mythologies of information technology and pluralist democracy.

The new information machines make people aware of variety. More than that, the machines are agents of variety; they can both stimulate and satisfy a demand for it. . . . The lesson of information theory is that choice and constraint can coexist as partners, enabling a system, be it a living organism, a language, or a society, to follow the arrow not of entropy but of history. (p.265)

It is comforting to know that we have the best of all theories as we move towards the best of all possible worlds.

David Sless
Canberra CAE

The Management Implications of New Information Technology *edited by Nigel Piercy*

(Croom Helm, London and Sydney, 1984) pp. 299, \$33.95, ISBN 0 7099 2073 3.

This is a difficult book to review in that while it raises and explores a variety of the issues generated by new information technology for the corporation and its managers, it is too restricted in its perspective: restricted in the sense that the contributors, by operating within a framework of management and the corporation as it is, leave some critical issues in abeyance. In particular, issues such as the potential for global bureaucratisation (i.e., new forms of worker and consumer domination) and the impact on older concepts of managerial legitimacy (i.e., with information accessibility enhanced, the rationale for managerial authority may be eroded) receive only slight attention.

The orientation of the bulk of the book's contents is more toward the conventional mechanical and engineering aspects of new information technology. While some weight is given to the 'employment impact' and to 'changes in work practices', the conclusions are no further advanced than those of the earlier soul-searching on the consequences of automation.

In other words, while the formal, mechanical and trade union related problems are canvassed, the human impact on people at work — at all levels in the hierarchy — while of dramatic economic and social importance, is left in the too-hard basket. Possibly this omission is a problem inherent in collections of papers. A real discipline is lacking as each author explores his own narrow field.

I am suggesting that a crucial question raised by the new information technology is either avoided or not raised by the editors and contributors: what are the mainsprings of technology choice and innovation within the firm? Is it a choice concerned with cost reduction or is it more related to control or disciplinary techniques over employees and over the organisation. Also, I become a little uncomfortable with the contributors' general

assumption that 'the new technology' is autonomous and automatic, employee and management alike ultimately having to accommodate themselves to it sensibly and sedately. Such reactions may, over the long term, be observable from the past, despite luddite skirmishing. But the future brings with it not only 'high tech', but also an employee who is more highly qualified and more acutely aware of work place domination and who recognises the practice and purpose of work place control. The new technology can, in their hands as well as the hands of management, be a two-edged sword.

Possibly, however, it is with such consequences in mind that Piercy, after a decade of growing management power (concomitant with unemployment) and therefore avoidance of the issue of power, again raises the question of socially useful work in the context of new technologies.

Still, if these contributions, particularly those of Part III, are taken seriously by management, it is possible that the paper-pulp will not be misused in the book's production. I must admit, however, that my initial apprehension concerning the contributors' ability to do much more than enunciate the conventional and expected has been largely unallayed.

The reason for my concern is that the principal orientation of the collection seems to be the management utilisation and integration within the corporation of the new information technology. The 'engineering' aspects and organisational design issues are the focus. All this, to draw on the contributors' conclusions, points to a further empowering of management. I believe that it is the implication for employees and consumers (i.e., us) of this potential augmentation of elite power that we should know more about before diving blindly into the high technology pool.

We need discussion of more than ergonomics of technical change. And we need more than a relation of the conventional trade union awareness of work-practice changes and the resulting compensatory bargaining. Rather, the ultimately dominant issues of power and control, both of the corporation and the wider society, require the attention of earnest seekers after truth.

So, is this volume yet another academic text on an 'in' theme, or does it really have something of importance to say? Despite the misgivings and criticisms I have voiced, I think at least that the issues, limited in scope and perspective to the management view of new information technology, are pertinent to management and all those concerned with the how, when and result of innovating the new generation of information technology. Some scales will certainly be removed from the eyes of an inherently conservative management echelon in Australia, particularly by Part III. But, after the pressures of working breakfasts, business lunches and sales and planning conferences, how many will have the energy to add the perspectives of this collection to their information systems?

H. Richards

University of Queensland