

Stiglitz takes a different view: decentralization turns on the limited capacities of individuals and firms to process and transmit information. Far too little attention has been given to the design of organizations, so this change of perspective is welcome. There are alternatives to 'the market' and 'government' and their design calls for research.

The fourth topic follows from Chapter 9 issues and is the role of government. Chapter 13, *Asking the Right Questions: Theory and Evidence* works through many traditional objections to government participation and intervention. The right questions have to be relevant to the information paradigm reality, not to the assumed world of perfect competition. Business lobby thinking tends to focus on claims about relative private and public performance of certain activities and to avoid consideration of what governments can do that the private sector cannot. Government has a power of compulsion, eg., to force tax payments. It can deal with social objectives and it can effect coordination in ways the market fails to do. In general, Chapter 13 suggests a very real need to rework the old ground of the role of the state from the new information-theoretic perspective.

This book makes accessible much of the new thinking about information economics. It will be a pity if its title unduly restricts its wide reading.

I have one major complaint. Despite Stiglitz's recognition of the added complexity that comes with the information paradigm and his plea for theories to say a lot about information, information itself remains a general purpose concept. The potential payoff from a characteristics approach to information could be great: in the design of organizations; in shaping policies for communications, research, competition and intellectual property rights; and in business strategy.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 See, for example, contributions included in D. M. Lambertson (ed.), *The Economics of Information and Knowledge*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth UK, 1971 and *The Economics of Communication and Information*, Edward Elgar International Library of Critical Writings in Economics, Cheltenham UK, 1996.

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Organizational Change: A Processual Approach by Patrick Dawson (Paul Chapman Publishing, London, 1994), pp. xii + 211, £14.95, ISBN 1-85396-237-6.

This text is the latest in a long line of books purporting to deal with how change is brought about within organizations. Dawson is critical of many of these texts. In particular, he finds fault with those who perpetuate "the orthodoxy imposed by Lewin's seminal work", arguing that they adopt "uncritically" Lewin's three phase model of planned change ("unfreezing, changing, and refreezing"), which he sees as inappropriate to the "dynamic nature of change in today's business world". Nor does he like the literature which relies on "anecdotes and metaphor" and, in particular, appears to wish to deal a body blow to Rosabeth Moss Kanter, whom he depicts as presenting "little of real use to the discerning manager".

Given these preliminary remarks, one would expect the author to come up with a frame somewhat different from that offered by Lewin and to offer something of real

use to managers. On the first count, he claims that his book will provide the reader with a "detailed understanding of organizational change through the systematic analysis of new empirical data", and on the second he asserts that his book will draw together this analysis to provide "a series of practical guidelines on the management of change".

His processual frame identifies "three general timeframes associated with organizational transitions:

- Conceptions of a need to change;
- Process of organizational transition;
- Operation of new work practices and procedures."

This passage occurs some twenty or so lines on from his strictures upon those who uncritically follow Kurt Lewin. Am I alone in hearing the ghost of Lewin not just stirring, but rampaging about behind these phrases? To be fair, Dawson is less interested in the stages than in what occurs between them: the complex non-linear processes of change. His processual framework claims to explain the process of transition.

And, of course, it does no such thing. The author provides a number of detailed case studies in which, in passing, one is invited to learn more than one wishes to know about railway freight operations, cellular manufacture at General Motors and the introduction of new technology to a laundry in South Australia. These are indeed very detailed cases and ought to provide us with a better handle on understanding change. For the most part, however, they are straightforward after-the-event accounts of perceptions and actions. In the case of the laundry, for example, after some preliminary stuff on the new technology, we are introduced to Central Linen Services and in particular to the general manager, who claims to have told the factory personnel that "they were probably the laziest bunch of layabouts it had ever been my misfortune to come across". One reading of the data provided by Dawson is that the general manager by-passed his management group ("he couldn't trust the management in the factory"), manipulated the workers by talking directly to them rather than through the unions as long as it suited his purpose ("it worked for two or three years and then it outlived its usefulness"), and browbeat into submission those of his managers he wished to keep ("The first thing I insisted on was that every senior manager should go through a complete battery of psychological appraisals." I love the term 'battery').

The problem I have with this kind of uncritical note taking is that most of the reported interviews come from the senior management (in terms of lineage, more than two-thirds of the material is from this source rather than from shopfloor employees, and the latter, quite unbelievably for a bunch identified as layabouts, are uncritical of the general manager's approach to change). More disturbingly, the interviewers appear to accept completely the accounts that are offered to them. Dawson does not find it necessary to explore and probe what his respondents offer as explanations. More importantly, some of the processes of change are probably embedded in the conversations that the general manager had face-to-face and, of course, we learn nothing of these. It is a similar story in the other case studies; bags of irrelevant but accessible data, naive self-serving accounts of how the process unfolded, and next to nothing about what occurs between people as it occurs. We remain ignorant of the shaping and being shaped which Dawson himself notes is at the heart of the change process: "In all the organizations studied, communication was central to bringing about a shift in employee attitudes." A real processual study would focus on this shaping, revealing to us what was said, when it was said, and by whom; not, as here, on after-the-event, image-enhancing rationalizations.

Given this approach, it is hardly surprising that Dawson is unable to come up with

anything other than the platitudinous when it comes to listing practical guidelines for managers. Every one of his fifteen points has been addressed at one time or another by organizational development practitioners (some of them he lists earlier in his book), and most of them are the commonplaces of consultant presentations. Many of them are a little more than what he terms the Rosabeth Moss Kanter "clichés and banalities".

Many an author creates problems for himself/herself in the first few pages of the text and this is no exception. Dawson clearly knows his way around the literature; he subjects it to rigorous and, for the most part, appropriate criticism; he is committed to an approach — studying change through time and in context — which promises much; and he has a number of well researched case studies, which contain more than he makes use of here. The book would be worth its cover price for these elements alone. In pushing Lewin's frame out a little, in building upon the work of Pettigrew *et al.*, Dawson offers a great deal. He promises more, however, than he delivers. There is nothing startling or new about the processual approach to organizational change, nor is the frame developed in this book. It is, however, substantially *grounded*, here using the term to convey the sense of having a foundation, but also to suggest that the theory does not yet fly. This is not a book for managers. It is a book for those interested in the continuing debate about the nature of change in organizations.

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The Networked Nation by the Australian Science and Technology Council (ASTEC) (Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1994) pp. iii + 82, A\$8.95, ISBN 0644-35058-X,

Traditionally, government reports excite little popular enthusiasm. But following high public interest in the US for creation of a national information infrastructure, this document may harness growing enthusiasm in Australia for a parallel venture. The report, however, is not an echo of American planning. Instead, it takes a close look at needs, institutions and available resources for a distinctly Australian situation. The role of government, for example, is to remain strong even as it fades as a development force in the US. The report's authors realise that major investments are now being made in what could be the components of a national network by institutional, commercial and governmental entities. The need for comprehensive planning and coordination among them remains best served by the federal government.

The report efficiently covers needs and benefits served by a national information network. While an 80 page report cannot be exhaustive in coverage on all these points, boxed stories and examples give substance to general goals throughout. The overall thrust of the report gives clear evidence of broadband networking's advantages for Australia. Particular attention is given to needs posed by distances to be covered within Australia and to service growing ties with other Asian/Pacific nations. As the report states, "Capacity and pricing are particularly important for Australia's international telecommunications links. The value to researchers of AARNet's trans-Pacific link to the Internet cannot be overstated, and its capacity cannot constrain Australia's international dialogue."

Organizationally, the report progresses logically from a consideration of what networks