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**BUZZING NETWORKS- the end of management**  
by P. Sedgeforth Davies  
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At the heart of this book is a simple but unstated question- 'If you remove management from an organisation, does what you are left with still work?' Davies starts with an analysis of the ideas of Henri Fayol, whose invention of management was, Davies asserts, the point where organisations started to go wrong. He then takes us through a case study of the seventies, and concludes by describing a radical new model.

The evidence that things have gone wrong is all around. Despite the introduction of computers we see a geometric rise in the cost of administration. In the worst cases there are more 'support staff' absorbing wealth than workers producing it, though these cases are happily very rare.

Davies' case study is Cold Stare Chemicals. Cold Stare was turned around from stagnation in the seventies by a radical new managing director, Harvey Nicholls. Despite his obvious success Davies asserts that Nicholls missed an opportunity. Instead of merely reducing the levels of management, he should have abolished management altogether.

So Davies starts where Nicholls left off. He asserts a simple premise; if a company is fully to use its employees skills and energy it must make them autonomous. Employees must be left to establish their own methods and relationships. In effect the 'informal structure', acknowledged by conventional thinkers in management, must become the only structure. Rather than a 'fix' for deficiencies in the formal structure, it becomes the driving force. This new approach is what Davies calls 'Networking'.

What then does Davies' model look like? He used a computer, and a set of neural genetic algorithms. He fed in the functional needs of Cold Stare, and details of an imaginary workforce with realistically human strengths and weaknesses. Having established the process and the constraints, he then provided details of the input and the required output, and the environment in which Cold Stare operates. Davies then left the computer to experiment, compressing thirty years of natural development into three calendar weeks. It is in the nature of genetic programs that he does not know what went on during that time.

The output was a new diagram- one which the computer found best fitted the given parameters. There are no straight lines or boxes, rather there are 'soft' shapes, called 'domains', representing functional areas such as Sales or Stores. The interfaces are not defined, as they are in a bureaucratic system, but are left to the workers. The shapes and interfaces are constantly changing, called 'Network Flux', and each diagram is only a snapshot, at one moment in time.

Clearly the network diagrams gave Davies food for thought. He describes how the shape of the domain tells a lot about it. It's area is an indicator of the number of people and their activities. The length of it's perimeter indicates the quantity of interaction with other domains. A narrow, long domain, especially one which snakes about, has a small area but great interaction. Davies says that this is an indication of a few people having too much influence, an example perhaps of 'Empire Building'. Is it too much to hope that a computer would force rational decisions where there is dysfunction such as this, or is such a statement a throwback on my part to line management ideas? Davies admits that his

model is still crude, but he thinks it can be translated into what he calls 'Buzzbox', a flexible, responsive, supportive information system. Let us all admit it, this would be revolutionary!

So, is this a post-modernist view of the running of an organisation? Davies gives an emphatic 'No!'. He does not see Networking as a deconstruction of management, but an acknowledgement that wisdom is not held uniquely by a few cadres. His is a positive view of an organisation as a confused and busy relationship of people carrying out a process. He sees workers as knowledgeable and highly skilled at real, productive tasks. Each spends, with the help of a computer, only an essential minimum of time doing things other than producing. He calls this situation 'buzzing'. Perhaps a better sub-title for the book would be 'the death of the meeting'?

So how does the administration get done? Davies is clearly influenced by Chaos Theory. He asserts that it is pointless to exert ever-increasing energy and time 'controlling' by feedback loops and consultation. He says you must accept that organisations are essentially uncontrollable and you should devote minimal time to keeping parts functioning individually, called 'tweaking', and all pointing in roughly the right direction, called 'aligning'. These are the key concepts. Davies presents many others. Particularly interesting are the notions of 'critical mass', 'heating', and 'overheating' reminiscent of primitive nuclear reactors. I will leave the reader to explore these in the book.

I do have some reservations about the book. The puns used in the chapter headings are excruciating; 'Fayol'd ideas'; 'Trust your workers, don't truss your workers!'; and so on. Having been trained in conventional management ideas Davies drops back at times into the verbosity typical of the breed. One is reminded of the style of public enquiry reports or educational treatises of the eighties and nineties. There is however a question which Davies foolishly avoids, but which might be crucial to the success of his ideas. 'Do people ever willingly declare themselves redundant?'

I think that this is a book which should be compulsory to anyone 'ruining', sorry 'running' (*I left in this Freudian slip, Ed.*) an organisation, or anyone working in one. What is needed now is to try out the ideas in a real organisation. Any volunteers?

Peter Scott  
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