

increase in frequency, variety, number of different sources, magnitude and intensity, and integration and amplification of isolated and small disturbances into large fields of crises' (p. 35). Hence the author's claim that organizations must be adaptive and managers must adjust their analytical and managerial skills to the complexity of the causes of crises. This requires holistic models of the world that best could be found in, so to speak, meta-disciplinary theories such as a unified field theory of physical, social, and individual phenomena.

Reading the book I oscillated between fascination and frustration. Thoroughly fascinating is the audacity of the attempt to transfer recent insights of thermodynamics to organizational growth and failure. Frustrating was that this transfer failed to convince me that it was possible on the basis of truly isomorphic structures in both fields, and yet it somehow sounded plausible. It is fascinating to see an American colleague inform his readers succinctly and comprehensively about the current state of world-future modelling approaches and then see him drift into personal judgements about Californian politics. One is impressed by the author's acute feeling of urgency regarding future environmental problems for organizations (human resources, political, social, market) and is disappointed that industrial relations and participation problems occur only in passing or as an afterthought in the context of 'problem-solving groups' as a managerial technique. While the book is generally very well written, some parts, e.g., the presentation of catastrophe theory, are mathematically too abbreviated for the mathematically trained student and too technical for the general reader.

On the whole, the book is a salient attempt at raising the consciousness of managers to a level that might help to cope with future problems. Its theoretical framework lends itself to integrating or classifying a multitude of present and future organizational problems in their actual or likely interdependence. The concrete illustrations given and some of the topics left out suggest that the author focussed on American readers.

Richard O. Mason and Ian I. Mitroff: Challenging Strategic Planning Assumptions

1981, New York: Wiley. 324 pages.

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Mason and Mitroff have spent over a decade, jointly and with other people, working on decision aids that use structured debates to clarify the assumptions made by policy makers. This book summarizes that work and makes it accessible to others. It provides specific instructions for two sets of decision support activities, and illustrates each method with several case examples. This practical core of the book — of primary interest to planners, consultants, and those who teach strategic decision making — is placed within a broader description of the kinds of complex problems which call for such methods, and

a theory of argumentation which is directly relevant to new research being done in the area of strategic management.

The first of the two methods described, the Strategic Assumption Surfacing and Testing (SAST) planning process, analyses alternative strategies by asking small groups from an organization to identify the assumptions upon which their preferred strategy depends. Once each group identifies pivotal assumptions (using techniques provided by the authors), a structured debate is staged between spokespersons for each strategy. The debate identifies points of agreement and disagreement in the assumptions which underline different strategies and helps decision makers identify areas in which more information is needed. The desired outcome of the process is a strategy which combines aspects of several alternatives, although a way of ranking alternatives is provided if this synthesis does not occur. Mason and Mitroff describe several cases in which the SAST process was successfully used, including a US Census Bureau workshop devoted to discussing alternative ways of adjusting the 1980 census for undercounted populations.

The second method described expands the dialectical debate concept as a decision support tool. The method requires that a plan for organizational action is opposed by a single counterplan. Those who argue on each side must respond to the same set of data, and an independent group of observers is asked to rate the plausibility of the claims made. Here again the desired outcome is a synthesis which captures desirable aspects of both plan and counterplan. The users of this planning aid include the management of an abrasive materials manufacturing company considering whether they should attempt to become the major international supplier of abrasives, or whether they should improve their position in the domestic market by backward and forward integration as well as expansion into related product areas.

Mason and Mitroff's own assumption throughout the book is that

'For every policy decision there are always at least two alternative choices that can be made. There is an argument for and against each alternative. It is by weighing the pros and cons of each argument that an informed decision can be reached. In policy making these processes of dialectics and argumentation are inescapable.' (p. 15)

I agree with this emphasis on argumentation, and have found in my own study of documents prepared by chief executive officers that the course of decision making is frequently affected by naturally occurring debates in the organization. I also agree with the author's emphasis on decision support methods which are participative (since knowledge of complex issues resides in many different individuals) and integrative (since complex issues are richly interconnected).

There has been some laboratory work which suggests that dialectic methods can be 'confusing' and that straightforward challenges to one strategy (a devil's advocate approach) yield better performance on decision tasks (Cosier, 1981; Schwenk, forthcoming). Mason and Mitroff note in response (1981) that their

techniques were developed to support decision making in highly complex and uncertain situations that are not easily captured in simulated or laboratory settings. In addition, they have found that participants need some orientation to their methods before they can be used successfully. The time recommended for completing the SAST procedure, for example, is three to four full days. Work by Cosier and Schwenk does suggest that the decision aids presented in this book should be reserved for the most critical issues facing an organization and perhaps that they will be most successful when used by seasoned managers. Another caution, and one mentioned briefly by the authors, is that these decision aids may be unduly sensitive to the persuasive debater. Despite these limitations, or better, because of them, this book provides a way of thinking about decision support that is more sophisticated than most methods of which I am aware. The perspective offered is above all relevant to the chief executive officer, whose central task, in Bower and Doz's words, is to 'shape the premises of other executives' thoughts'.

References

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Gisèle Asplund and Göran Asplund: An Integrated Development Strategy

1982, New York: Wiley. 131 pages.

The central idea of this book, that any change in organizational phenomena (especially change in corporate strategy) needs to be understood as an integration of change processes in technical and social problem areas, is certainly not a new one. The Tavistock approach under the banner of sociotechnical systems has dealt with this perspective of change for several decades. It is a shame that the authors do not make even one reference to the sociotechnical model in order to try to enlighten the reader about the similarities and differences between the former theoretical perspective and their own Integrated Development Strategy (IDS) approach. Apart from the similarities, there are also some differences which, if highlighted, might have helped make the vague IDS model more specific, understandable and applicable. Instead the authors have based their thinking on their own consulting experience as well as on the theoretical ideas of Chris Argyris, to

