Book Reviews

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Capitalizing on Knowledge: from e-business to k-business

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Oxford, Butterworth Heinmann, 2001, xix + 331 pp., ISBN 0-7506-5011-7

This is an unashamedly practical book which seeks to give the reader the capability to implement methods for using the Internet to 'market and deliver' knowledge-based products and services. As such the book sits at the juncture of—or rather seeks to exploit the synergy perceived by the author to exist between—two of the significant current themes in business and management research, namely e-commerce and knowledge management. This is termed by the author as k-business. As he states 'By combining the potential of the Internet with an explicit approach to commercializing its knowledge, virtually every organization can create k-business opportunities . . . This book goes beyond the dot.com marketing hype and takes a critical look at how the Internet can be used as a vehicle for creating and sustaining a successful k-business' (p. xiv).

Although the book is designed and written for practical use it is by no means devoid of theoretical content. The first chapter presents an overview of the current state of the knowledge management field although this is heavily biased towards the resource-based approach of Nonaka and Takeuchi[1] which places emphasis on what the organisation 'can do' as opposed to what Clark[2] has termed 'the strategic fantasies of formal, written mission statements'. The analytical leverage of knowledge management rests in its claim to be able to be both: mine the existing knowledge assets of the firm, and to create new knowledge. Such is the pace of change in the emergent field of knowledge management, however, that developments in practice far outweigh attempts at theorising.[3] Consequently this book cannot be too heavily criticised for its particular summary of knowledge management theory as its emphasis is clearly related to the theme of the book.

The second chapter considers the evolution of e-commerce over the last few years as well as detailing the different types of e-business which currently exist. In doing so it also considers the dot.com boom of recent years and addresses the causes of success and failure of these companies. The message is quite clear and supports the argument of Crowther *et al.*[4] that the world of e-business is not going away, despite the problems caused by the euphoria of the early rush into such business and that the WWW has changed the way in which many companies will do at least a part of their business in the future, and along with that change has come

a change in the relationship between entrepreneurs and their investors.[5] At the same time this chapter provides the stepping stone into the message of the rest of the book.

The next three chapters therefore, which comprise half of the book, elaborate this theme which is concerned with the management and marketing of knowledge by companies through e-commerce as k-business. In the third chapter the evolution of Internet markets over the last few years is considered along with the options available for generating revenue in these markets. Chapter 4 is concerned with knowledge markets and the criteria for successful market development, using evidence from actual companies to elaborate opportunities for success and problems leading to failure. Chapter 5 addresses the turning of knowledge into marketable products or services, showing how this knowledge can be packaged in a value creating way. It argues that different packaging methods are appropriate for different types of knowledge as well as showing the importance of building a balanced portfolio of knowledge products or services. This part of the book provides the key message of the author as well as showing how k-business can be created.

This section is followed by two chapters dealing with marketing. In these the author shows that the conventional approach to the marketing of intangibles— based upon the convention of either the 4Ps or the 7Ps (or in the description of the author 4Ps + 3Cs)—is changed when the Internet is the marketing medium. This leads the author to the development of his own model—the 10Ps of Internet marketing. These include familiar ones such as positioning as well as new ones such as portals, personalisation and processes. Here the author makes several claims such as that Porter's[6] five forces model is in need of re-evaluation and that 'Success in this dynamic marketing environment calls for better customer knowledge and better management of knowledge in all aspects of marketing. Knowledge management should therefore be a core activity of every marketing function' (p. 193). The author is bold and forthright in his claims and his message but supports his claims by credible argument and supporting evidence.

The next chapter is a practical chapter which takes the argument and evidence from the preceding chapters and draws it together in looking at the practicalities of establishing an Internet knowledge business. The author organises it into a set of seven key factors for success. The final chapter of the book is forward looking and attempts to deal with the future of an online knowledge economy. It identifies some of the challenges posed to organisations by technological regulatory and economic factors and some of the dilemmas posed. For example, he considers whether or not there is a need for what he terms a 'World Knowledge Organisation where global knowledge experts develop a regulatory framework for the future not the past' (p. 257). This chapter is necessarily speculative but the author attempts to present a balanced set of merits and demerits for each of the possibilities which he identifies.

One of the problems facing any author seeking to write about such topics is the rapidly changing fields of e-commerce and knowledge management and the author recognises this fully. In seeking to address this problem, the author provides a website to provide updated information. He also invites readers to contact him via email with the objective that any information provided will be shared with others through the website. This is a potentially valuable resource which makes this book interactive. At the same time this site provides links to other useful sources of information, one of which is the author's own consultancy, so potentially benefiting him as well as readers of the book. It certainly, however, distinguishes this book

from others addressing similar areas and is a commendable way of putting into practice some of the messages contained in the book.

Generally the book is well written and attractively presented. Its appearance and usefulness is enhanced by the incorporation of what he terms case studies but which I would describe as scenarios to illustrate particular points in the text. Also scattered throughout the book are what he describes as 'knowledge nuggets' which are really short items contained in boxed panels and which illustrate examples of best practice or key points in the material. Both of these are indexed separately and so can be used for reference without re-reading the book. Each chapter follows the same format of providing the text, appropriately interspersed with case studies and knowledge nuggets as well as tables and diagrams to illustrate and reinforce key points. The practical focus of the book is further emphasised by each chapter finishing with a summary of the key points elaborated and what are described as 'Points to ponder' which are really questions designed to help the reader relate the content of the chapter to his/her own organisation. Additionally the book is well indexed, contains a detailed glossary of important terms and a full bibliography as well as notes at the end of each chapter. There are also four appendices which are helpful to practitioner readers as they provide instruments to assess the readiness of an organisation to launch a k-business; to evaluate online market places; to evaluate the potential impact of a website; and a checklist of activities needed for the planning and development of a website. Thus the book meets its claim of providing a valuable and useful resource to anyone involved in e-business or knowledge management, or considering becoming involved, but its rigour and presentation also make it of value to students and academics involved in these topics.

This book is in part evangelical, as the author's vision of the possibilities for the future are quite clear; part theoretical in that there is solid evidence and argument underpinning his message; and part practical in providing a useful blueprint for setting up a k-business. It succeeds quite well in achieving this and in offering something for each of its target markets of practitioners, managers, academics and students. This is helped both by its presentation and the writer's style which makes it enjoyable to read. It therefore fills a distinct place in the market for books in this area and I would recommend it to anyone interested, involved or merely curious.

Notes and References

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2. P. Clark, *Organisations in Action*, Routledge, London, 2000.
3. C. Carter, 'Keepers of the knowledge capital: legislating for the new millennium', *Management Decision*, 38, 4, 2000, pp. 38–42.
4. D. Crowther, C. Carter and S. Cooper, 'Challenging the predictive ability of accounting techniques in modelling organisational futures', *Management Decision*, 39, 2, 2001, pp. 137–46.
5. D. Crowther, 'Corporate reporting, stakeholders and the Internet: mapping the new corporate landscape', *Urban Studies*, 37, 10, 2000, pp. 1837–48; D. Crowther, 'The psychoanalysis of on-line auditing', *Journal of Managerial Psychology* (forthcoming).
6. M. E. Porter, *Competitive Strategy*, The Free Press, New York, 1980.

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Technology and In/equality. Questioning the Information Society

Sally Wyatt, Flis Henwood, Nod Miller and Peter Senker (Eds)

London, Routledge, 2000, xii + 242 pp., £15.99, ISBN 0-415-23023-3 (pbk),
0-415-23022-5 (hbk)

Few collections of papers are worth more than the sum of their parts. This one is
worth a great deal more, which is not to say that all the parts are equally valuable.
It is to say that the editors have gathered papers that not only complement each
other in addressing a common theme, but also make a substantial contribution to
understanding. Most authors writing about the information society are concerned
only with information technology (IT), and then really only with the benefits of IT.
This volume restores some balance: it ranges well beyond the confines of IT and it
considers problems as well as solutions, costs as well as benefits. There are few
incentives to adopt such an approach; instead there is enormous, remorseless,
tedious pressure to accept what the IT industry says about itself and its product
(even to take its shilling—for research, of course), to join with politicians and
public servants in the chant of approval, to be associated by acquiescence with the
electronic miracle. In the modern academic world, to accede is to be positive and
constructive; to doubt is to be negative and destructive. These, then, are brave
editors and brave authors whose stance will not increase their chances of finding
research funding. All hail from, or have some association with, the Department of
Innovation Studies at the University of East London, a unit that sprung from
unpromising beginnings, has proved its mettle in a world hostile to nonconformity,
and must now expect to suffer the consequences.

In a more critical world, the current plight of high technology industry, and
especially the dot.com fiasco, would have warned against unbridled enthusiasm for
IT. This issue is addressed in the editors' penetrating Introduction. Why is it, they
ask, that Tony Blair, the British Prime Minister—and a man no more computer
literate than his cat—loses no opportunity to emphasise the centrality of IT in
government policy? Tony's chum and architect of the Happy Way, the Blessed
Anthony Giddens, also rates a mention, but not the extraordinary
e-commerce@its.best.uk (a report title that confuses even the most sophisticated
software), the government's fanatical blueprint for making the UK the best place in
the world to trade electronically, nor the Office of the E-Envoy, silly by
international, and even New Labour, standards. Why is IT such an aphrodisiac?
There is no ready answer, of course, but the volume's authors do their level best to
find one. They certainly ask the right questions. And that is a major strength of this
work: it asks questions considered injudicious by so many for so long that they now
rarely cross the conscious mind.

Pure enjoyment awaits the reader of the volume's first few chapters. Graham
Thomas and Sally Wyatt provide a thoroughly informed account of the Internet's
development and conclude—wait for it—that the Internet can be pretty useless
and rather boring. Indeed it can. Rod Allen and Nod Miller follow with a piece that
finds the claims made for the Web as fantastic as those made for cable a generation
earlier. Access to the technology, they point out as patiently as they can, does not
ensure profitable use of the technology, or even any use at all. Kathy Walker then
treats us to a blockbuster of a paper on public service broadcasting. The very
technology that has given so many people access to so many television channels has
also allowed even more concentration of ownership in the industry, reduced the

real choice available to viewers, and subjected public broadcasting to competitive pressures it was never designed to withstand. So that's what happened to BBC sport. Herbert Pimlott completes the section on the limitations of mere access to IT with a paper on community television stations in Canada. How therapeutic to compare the forecasts of 30 years ago with the situation now, and how refreshing the conclusion that this IT innovation is—surely like most of them—of minor importance. How rarely is the diminutive related to any aspect of IT.

Would that this reviewer could be as enthusiastic about the two papers that make up the volume's central section, on gender and computer education. Flis Henwood, Sarah Plumeridge and Linda Stepulevage compare the experience of five female undergraduates on a traditional computer course with that of five women on an interdisciplinary IT course. They conclude that 'to fail to understand the social and cultural nature of the gender–technology relationship will result in aborted attempts at change in those relationships' (p. 128). Oh really? They also conclude—no need at all to wait for this one—that female students perform better than male students in assessment. Even so, both male and female students associate competence in IT with masculinity. So obsessed are the authors with teasing out accusations of lesbianism, and with generally deconstructing the gendered discourse of technology (yes, there are those at the University of East London who speak this language) that they fail to appreciate that their sample size is far too small to treat quantitatively, and that a much more pervasive and pertinent characteristic of these students than their gendered attitude to IT is that they are well nigh illiterate. Judged by their own words in quotation, these students could no more comprehend the deconstruction of the gendered discourse of technology than they could fly.

The second half of this embarrassing section is provided by Nod Miller, Helen Kennedy and Linda Leung. They also study their own students, a practice that should be banned by international convention. Specifically, they are interested in 'access to information-technology related higher education for mature black women'. Aren't we all? Actually, the authors do make one important point: they note that, because distance learning attracts difficult students, it is not an obvious and simple means of bringing education to all. But instead of exploring the implications of this observation for those who would prostitute their universities by selling half-baked Internet courses to anyone in the world stupid enough to buy them, the paper follows a different course. The reader is given access to a project meeting reviewing the progress of students who were 'all women from ethnic minority backgrounds, all were mothers, many were single parents and all but one lived in east London . . .' (p. 131). For goodness sake, who cares? There is no place for this mind-numbing political correctness towards mature black women in a volume the whole purpose of which is to excite by being politically incorrect about IT!

The volume's third section considers social inequality and returns the reader to scholarship. Gavin Poynter and Alvaro de Miranda take Bell and Toffler to task. Manufacturing did, does, and will matter, but the really rotten jobs are not to be found in the rustbelts and among the smokestacks. Look instead at IT. Look at call centre work. Some 2% of UK employment is now in such hell holes and almost half of Europe's call centres are in the UK, no doubt because UK employment legislation is already conducive to making the UK the best place in the world to trade electronically. Now there's a policy achievement for New Labour. The volume concludes with a chapter from Peter Senker reminding us that the social and

economic miracle of IT is actually being wrought in a world in which the chasm between rich and poor is vast and widening, in which the rich are getting richer and the poor poorer. Senker is as despairing of trickle-down economics as he is of nice notions of being information rich. Chris Freeman goes further, as Chris Freeman so often does. In a paper that ranges from the plight of labour in the nineteenth century docks, through the pressures for a welfare state in the UK, to long wave theories of technological change, Freeman declares that being unaware of what IT cannot and does not do is less than sensible, and that it is *morally* wrong to accept much of what IT is and is not doing. In an academic world often more concerned with quantity than with quality of research, in which research is more likely to be undertaken to satisfy not curiosity but the terms of the academic's contract of employment, and in which 'research-led' means about as much as 'internationally excellent' or 'total commitment to organisational mission and vision', it takes a scholar of Freeman's stature to remind us that research demands a moral stance. Lesser mortals are fully occupied with ensuring that they are all singing from the same hymn-sheet, marching to the same drumbeat. Amidst this anodyne consensus on IT, it is far too easy to forget not only that our intellect feeds on diversity, but also that some things are right, and some things quite simply wrong.

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Voices from the Shopfloor: Dramas of the Employment Relationship

Anne-Marie Greene

Aldershot, Ashgate, 2001, pp. vii + 149, £39.95, ISBN 0-7546-1096-9

The purpose of this book is to consider the use of ethnography as a form of research in order to understand industrial relations issues and to demonstrate the usefulness of this approach to research. As the author states 'This volume is about the relationships, interactions, memories and histories that make up industrial relations, brought alive on the page through the discourse of those involved. It is through ethnography that such stories are possible' (p. 3). In undertaking this venture the author makes use of the voices of the people involved to supplement the observations and interpretations of the researcher and to demonstrate how these are enriched by including the voices of those being researched in order to argue for an ethnographic approach to this kind of research.

This book is one volume in a series with the theme of 'Voices in Development Management' and the theme of the argument is that the ethnographical approach advocated is particularly suitable to the understanding of industrial relations in the developing world. Given that the author argues that there is a need to consider industrial relations as consisting of a complex web of social interactions then there is certainly a strong argument for supplementing the voice of the researcher (who observes and interprets from a Western perspective) with voices of the researched as this can only enable a richer understanding.

For a book which aims to demonstrate the usefulness of ethnographic approaches to research in the developing world, the author chooses an interesting and unusual approach in that her main example used in the book is based upon

the lock manufacturing industry in England. This example is obviously derived from the author's own research over a number of years. By describing this approach as interesting and unusual it is not intended to suggest that this approach is inappropriate, as this main example is supplemented by a consideration of a number of other ethnographic studies from a variety of different parts of the world. The synthesis of the research methods adopted and findings from these different studies clearly supports the argument of the appropriateness of this methodology within the developing world, but I would contend that it provides a clear argument for the appropriateness of an ethnographic methodology for this kind of research which is independent of geographical or socio-cultural location. In achieving this, of course, the declared aim of the author is also met.

The book is organised into five chapters with the first chapter considering the different methodological approaches to industrial relations which are generally used. The author argues that a quantitative approach to research dominates this field and that as a consequence there is a lack of research in developing countries. In this chapter the author surveys the field of extant research which she argues is increasingly dominated by survey-based research and critiques the generaliseability of findings from such research, particularly when applied to developing countries. From this she moves to an argument for the use of ethnographical approaches as a means for giving voice to the accounts of the people involved. By doing this she argues it makes more accessible the understanding of the 'various dramas of the employment relationship' (p. 8) which for her are the foundations of industrial relations. This is of particular concern in the understanding of industrial relations in developing countries 'when one considers that industrial relations behaviours and institutions may have very different meanings and functions in differing cultures' (p. 10). In this chapter therefore the author makes a theoretical case for the benefits of ethnographic approaches to research which are of particular significance to an understanding of the developing parts of the world. The remainder of the book is devoted to using ethnographic studies to show why this is so.

The bulk of the book consists of three chapters each dealing with one major theme of particular importance to industrial relations, described by the author as dramas of the employment relationship. In chapter 2 the author deals with paternalism. Here she argues that paternalism is an important component of management style and expected behaviour within the UK lock manufacturing industry which is based upon a historical legacy. This legacy has been 'handed down through generations of workers to generate a collective memory of experiences and expectations' (p. 47). Moreover she shows that it has some positive features attached. For developing countries the author argues that a historical legacy is important and that paternalism is equally prevalent, albeit in different guises. It would seem to me that this consideration of paternalism and historical legacies in developing countries should extend naturally into colonialism and post-colonialism. This is not, however, touched upon by the author whereas some mention would greatly enhance the central argument of the book in its consideration of developing countries and would also go some way towards an explanation of the differences between the findings of the UK studies and those of overseas areas. Moreover it could be expected that an ethnographic approach using the voices of the researched would uncover these aspects of the historical legacy which would not necessarily be revealed using other approaches.

The theme dealt with in the next chapter is that of gender and family and in this chapter the author shows the relationship between historical contexts of

development and contemporary context of development by showing, for example, the similarities between nineteenth-century women lock workers and late twentieth-century women porters in Accra. She shows that while most studies show that family and community are important to an understanding of workplace processes and consequently to industrial relations, these are insufficient and that there is a need to understand also the gendered nature of family, community and workplace structured practices. Moreover she shows that the normal binarisms adopted of developed–developing, traditional–modern are insufficient and that 'there should be continuous cross currents between developed and developing world contexts, with much to be learnt on both sides' (p. 78). The arguments and insights in this chapter are interesting and show clearly why it can be appropriate to situate a discussion of industrial relations in the developing world within a framework considering the UK lock manufacturing industry.

In chapter four the theme of collective action is considered and the impact of this upon industrial relations is explored. The author argues that while the maintenance of solidarity is important to collective action, this is becoming increasingly problematical in the developed world and is even more problematic in the developing world. She argues that micro accounts of 'the how and why of collective action' (p. 111) are largely missing from accounts of trade union action at a workplace level. She then proceeds to show how ethnographic studies which give voice to those involved allow a greater understanding of the processes and interactions involved in collective action. This in turn enables a greater understanding of which strategies are likely to be more successful in which contexts. For theorists this is important but for activists this is of even greater importance, no matter whether the context is the developed world or the developing world. The examples used from around the world amply illustrate this point and thereby make the case for the use of ethnographic studies in enabling a better understanding of collective action in the industrial relations processes.

The final chapter brings together the themes which have emerged from the various research studies and how this had only been possible through an ethnographic approach which gave voice to those who are the subject of the research. The author argues that this type of research is needed to increase our understanding. She fully recognises that other approaches to researching industrial relations are needed and provide useful findings and theoretical understanding and that this type of ethnographical research has problems, as well as recognising that conducting such research is time consuming. She also outlines some possible future directions for ethnographic research into industrial relations, focusing particularly upon the impact of globalisation and of the new information and communication technologies. In doing so she offers potential future research agendas to be taken up by those interested.

The book is well-written and the author adopts a very readable style which is at the same time sufficiently rigorous to enable the arguments posited to be clearly articulated within the various themes adopted. It is well researched and the extensive bibliography provided shows that the author has clearly situated her arguments within the major discourses appropriate to her subject. A useful resource is provided as an appendix to this book and this is described as an Ethnographic Resource Archive. This consists of details of the eight ethnographic studies which are considered in the book and gives details of the context in which the research was carried out, details of the various methods used in the research and a summary of the main themes emerging from each study. This can be

cross-referenced with the bibliography to gain further details and perhaps more significantly show the commonalities of the themes emerging from these studies, thereby supporting the main arguments of the book.

In summary therefore this is a book which should be of interest both to those interested in industrial relations and to those interested in ethnographic research, whether in the developed world or the developing world as it has something to offer to all of these communities.

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In Praise of Bureaucracy

Paul du Gay

Sage, London, 2000, xi + 149 pp., £16.00, ISBN 0-7619-5504-6 (pbk)

Paul Du Gay's startlingly titled *In Praise of Bureaucracy* sets out to develop Weberian perspectives on the ethos of the office as an extension of human possibility, rather than a dehumanising experience. The latter line of thinking being the dominant portrayal and critique of the bureaucrat—or more particularly bureaucracy—in both philosophy and management practice. However, Du Gay explores critiques of bureaucracy to inform a more sophisticated discussion.

Popular anti-bureaucratic criticisms concentrate on two contradictory representations of the bureaucrat. The first caricatures office holders as drafters of regulations that enable the state or corporation to control the behaviour of citizens or employees and, in the process, extend their own influence in a rather malevolent fashion. The second sees bureaucrats as somewhat idle creatures, concentrating on their own interests during office hours.

Such representations suggest to Du Gay that bureaucracy is not a simple phenomenon; his stance is that popular conceptions may be confused and paradoxical. While we (as citizen or employee) might experience frustration in dealing with bureaucracy, we might also learn to see our frustrations as an inevitable outcome of achievements associated with other objectives that we value highly. Accordingly, objectives such as fairness, justice and equality are 'crucial qualitative features of modern government' (or perhaps governance) that we tend to take for granted. Du Gay goes on to make the case that it is thus inappropriate for the citizen employee to ascribe to the bureaucracy any ethical or moral analyses that they might apply to their individual choices or actions. As he comments, bureaucracy is rational in very particular ways.

His analysis of both the philosophical critique and mangerialist perspectives suggest that, in their very different ways, each regard the ethos of office as being anachronistic; and he counters their charges of unworldliness by addressing them in turn.

In the first part of the book, he develops these notions by closely examining the work of three 'anti-bureaucrats' Alasdair MacIntyre, Zygmundt Bauman and Tom Peters. He challenges their view that all areas of social life should be united and the individual can overcome the alienation caused by the different roles they inhabit.

In the second part, he develops the critique by focussing on the restructuring that has taken place in the public services in response to the agenda of the 'new public management' and the priority that has been given to more market-oriented managerial ethics. This has had the effect of changing the public service, but not for the better, in securing effective democratic systems of government.

Du Gay's thoughtful, well-developed and clearly presented analysis appears highly relevant to debates about the future of public management. It also makes a distinctive and scholarly contribution to the field of sociology and public administration. Arguably, the book is essential reading for both public administration students and those who participate in public policy formation.

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