

Focus: Management Information Systems

The Information Edge

By N. Dean Meyer and Mary E. Boone
New York: McGraw-Hill, 1987, 333 pages,
\$24.95

Information Systems for Management

Edited by Hugh J. Watson, Archie B. Carroll,
and Robert I. Mann
Plano, TX: Business Publications, Inc., 1987, 3d
ed., 514 pages, \$19.95

Managing End User Computing in Information Organizations

By William H. Inmon
Homewood, IL: Dow Jones-Irwin, 1986, 216
pages, \$30.00

Managing Information as a Corporate Resource

By Paul L. Tom
Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman and Company,
1987, 322 pages, \$31.95

The explosive growth of information technology and its use by senior executives has been accompanied by a proliferation of books that aspire to explain the strategic benefits, management challenges, and future directions of the information revolution. These four books are among the most recent additions to the literature. Each takes a different approach to exploring the current and future role of information technology in the corporate setting, and for that reason may interest distinct audiences.

The Information Edge, written by two consultants in the office automation field, shares many of the characteristics of other books in this area. It combines a readable review of the academic literature with a heavy dose of proselytizing about the operating and strategic benefits of information technology. While few readers still need to be convinced of the potential contribution of computers to busi-

ness strategy and practice, several of the case studies discussed by Meyer and Boone are enlightening. Individual chapters examine the role of MIS in marketing, finance, people management, and other aspects of corporate operations.

Information Systems for Management is a collection of thirty previously published essays, several of which first appeared in the *Sloan Management Review*, that address four general topics: developments in hardware and software; frameworks for understanding the use of computers by senior executives; issues in MIS management and control; and the social impact of information technology. Several of the essays are by now classics in the field—so much so that their inclusion may be of limited value, since many readers will have encountered them elsewhere. But that is a potential weakness of any collection of essays, and there is enough new material, especially in areas such as expert systems and MIS management and control, that the volume should be of interest to both generalists and readers familiar with the MIS literature.

The remaining two books focus on questions of managing and controlling the use of computers in large organizations. William Inmon's book, *Managing End User Computing in Information Organizations*, is an overview of the hardware, software, and management issues surrounding the use of information technology by noncomputing professionals. The volume is written in the spirit of a guide or resource book—alerting the reader to issues of structure or implementation he or she might otherwise overlook and describing the challenges of the position of the chief information officer. The book is well organized, and Inmon's writing is concise. While many of the issues he raises will be familiar to MIS professionals, the scope of the book makes it valuable nonetheless.

Managing Information as a Corporate Resource devotes individual chapters to issues such as information strategic planning, systems development, systems security, and systems support. Each chapter begins with a case, often quite extensive, that explores relevant issues in a real-world corporate setting. For example, a chapter on technology planning begins with a review of John Reed's work in this area at Citicorp.

All inquiries about these books should be addressed directly to the publishers

General Listings

The Goal: A Process of Ongoing Improvement

By Eliyahu M. Goldratt and Jeff Cox

Croton-on-Hudson, NY: North River Press, 1987, rev. ed., 274 pages, \$15.00

Not often is a romance novel included in a listing of significant business titles, but consultants Goldratt and Cox have chosen precisely that vehicle to present their approach to manufacturing efficiency, which they call optimized production technology (OPT). This book was published privately in 1986, but its popularity among large companies such as Hughes Aircraft and Teledyne persuaded North River Press to issue a revised and expanded edition.

The Goal is the fictional story of Alex Rogo, a division manager at UniCo, whose plant and marriage are about to collapse. Rogo is under the gun from his superiors to increase productivity, and from his wife to spend more time at home. He manages to resolve these pressures with the advice of a former college professor, whose message is modeled on the consulting practices of Goldratt and Cox. This literary approach may not appeal to all readers, but the popularity of the first edition of *The Goal* suggests it has a large potential audience.

How to Run Better Business Meetings

By the 3M Meeting Management Team

New York: McGraw-Hill, 1987, 216 pages, \$18.95

Six managers from 3M Corporation have collaborated on a guide to effective meetings that combines intelligent discussions of academic research on topics such as group dynamics with chapters on nuts-and-bolts considerations such as "how to design good visuals" and "multilingual meetings." Many of the specific meeting-improvement techniques presented by the authors are taken directly from practices at 3M. The book is well written and well organized, and makes good use of graphics.

The Leading Edge: CEOs Who Turned Their Companies Around: What They Did and How They Did It

By Mark Potts and Peter Behr

New York: McGraw-Hill, 1986, 220 pages, \$16.95

Two business reporters from the *Washington Post* have written yet another book about managerial triumphs. What is different about this volume is

that it highlights the world of top executives at giant companies such as General Motors, AT&T, and RCA that have been criticized in other books on corporate management such as *In Search of Excellence*. Potts and Behr examine the leadership styles of big business executives who are turning their firms around and regaining the competitive edge.

Potts and Behr are good reporters, and they obviously enjoyed a good deal of access to most of the executives and companies about which they write. Thus, their book contains many interesting quotes and anecdotes, and it is enjoyable to read. However, it suffers from the one flaw that seems to afflict so many tales of corporate renewal. In their zeal to recount business triumphs, Potts and Behr overlook existing or potential pitfalls. This is most obvious in their celebration of GM chairman Roger Smith, who only a year ago ranked among the country's most admired business executives. However, GM's continued loss of market share to Ford and Chrysler, massive layoffs and plant closings, and the forced departure of Ross Perot, have contributed to Smith's loss of prestige. A reader must search long and hard in *The Leading Edge* for signs of Smith's impending decline.

Managed Trade: The New Competition between Nations

By Raymond J. Waldmann

Cambridge, MA: Ballinger, 1987, 204 pages, \$29.95

This is an illuminating introduction to the debate over U.S. trade policy by a business executive whose background allows him to explore the subject with some authority. Waldmann is a graduate of Harvard Law School and has served as Assistant Secretary of Commerce for International Economic Policy. He is now director of government affairs for Boeing, one of this country's most successful exporters.

Managed Trade was not written for individuals who are already familiar with the legislative struggles over and market implications of such protectionist measures as import quotas on steel, "voluntary restraints" by Japanese car producers, and the Multi-Fiber Arrangement that governs trade in textiles. However, for readers looking for a sober, informed, and efficiently presented guide to these and other issues, Waldmann's book may be the resource of choice.

Managerial Courage: Revitalizing Your Company Without Sacrificing Your Job
By Harvey A. Hornstein
New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1986, 224 pages, \$18.95

This is a readable book on an understudied topic—the sources of and limits to individual dissent and initiative in the large corporation. It is based on a study of 200 U.S. and Japanese managers. Hornstein identifies four major “behavioral types”: courageous, confronting, disaffected, and conforming. Hornstein also argues against the application of Japanese management practices in the U.S. The book has been praised warmly by several management authorities, including retired Sloan School professor Richard Beckhard.

Managing the Corporate Social Environment: A Grounded Theory

By Robert H. Miles
Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1987, 319 pages, \$29.95

The focus of this book is on corporate social performance—that is, on how well large U.S. companies understand and manage industry-specific, social, and political factors that affect their strategies and practices. Miles is a consultant who has taught at the Harvard Business School and the Yale School of Organization and Management. Research for the book was sponsored by Harvard.

Managing the Corporate Social Environment is an important addition to the literature on corporate responsibility. It is especially valuable because of the strength of its empirical base. Woven throughout the book are the results of extensive interviews and field research on the insurance industry, research that makes for fascinating case studies and contrasts. Miles has the candor to identify the “best” companies—Aetna, Prudential, and St. Paul—as well as the “worst” companies—Falmouth and Gannett—and compare their policies and conduct.

MaxiMarketing: The New Direction in Promotion, Advertising, and Marketing Strategy

By Stan Rapp and Tom Collins
New York: McGraw-Hill, 1986, 278 pages, \$19.95

Rapp and Collins are the founders of a direct-response advertising agency that bears their name

and is now part of Omnicom, the “superagency” created by the DDB-Needham-BBDO merger. This book presents their vision of the future of marketing strategy and, in particular, the evolution from mass marketing (1950s and 1960s) to segmentation and line extension (1970s) to niche marketing (early 1980s) to what the authors term “one-to-one marketing.”

Rapp and Collins argue that important developments in computer technology, the electronic media, and the telecommunications industry have fundamentally changed how firms can and should reach their target markets. They make their case using a nine-step model, and devote one chapter to each step. This is an enjoyable and stimulating book—not so light as to be dismissed easily, not so rigorous as to make for taxing reading. It is rich in examples of innovative marketing techniques and suggestions for future approaches

Organizational Economics

Edited by Jay B. Barney and William G. Ouchi
San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1986, 495 pages, \$32.95

The subtitle of this collection of previously published essays, *Toward a New Paradigm for Studying and Understanding Organizations*, suggests its academic character. Ouchi is best known for his best-seller *Theory Z: How American Management Can Meet the Japanese Challenge*. This book has a very different mission and is targeted to a very different audience.

Organizational Economics is composed of fifteen essays by authors as diverse as Joseph Schumpeter and Michael Porter. The idea is to bring together innovative and classic works in organizational theory and microeconomics so as to produce a more robust understanding of how and why organizations function. The individual essays are grouped into chapters, each of which begins with an overview by Barney and Ouchi.

Performance Assessment: Methods and Applications

Edited by Ronald A. Berk
Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987, 544 pages, \$47.50

This collection of original essays by a distinguished group of contributors explores the theory, practice, and future of performance assessment, which

Ronald Berk defines as "the process of gathering data by systematic observation for making decisions about an individual." In an era when creative approaches to human resource management figure prominently in the competitive strategies of many corporations, procedures used to measure individual performance take on great importance.

The strength of these essays is in their level of detail and the depth of their research. These are not abstract explorations of manager-employee interaction. Many of the articles include actual questionnaires, excerpts from performance appraisal reports, and reviews of appraisal systems used in particular companies.

Rating America's Corporate Conscience

By Steven D. Lydenberg, Alice Tepper Marlin, Sean O'Brien Strub, and the Council on Economic Priorities

Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1987, 499 pages, \$14.95

Campaigns to discourage or encourage purchases of particular goods and services are an increasingly popular tool with which consumer groups and others pressure companies to change labor policies, investment decisions, etc. This book, compiled by a respected research organization, may represent a new stage in the effort to link consumer buying decisions and the social conduct of large corporations. Thus, it may be of interest less as a resource than as an example of the growing sophistication of public interest groups.

The Council on Economic Priorities developed a checklist to rate the conduct of American business. Its criteria include the level of charitable contributions, the number of women and minority directors and officers, involvement in South Africa, and other traditional concerns of the public interest community. The book then lists specific brands and organizes them by product category. For example, its section of "frozen desserts" includes Polar Bars, Jello-O Pops, Eskimo Pies, etc. The brands are matched with their companies, and readers can decide for themselves which firms warrant their patronage.

Technological Innovation

Edited by Denis O. Gray, Trudy Solomon, and William Hetzner

New York: Elsevier Science Publishers, 1986, 333 pages, \$60.00

This is a collection of articles originally delivered at a conference sponsored by the National Science Foundation. As with most such collections, the quality and accessibility of the articles are uneven. Still, the volume contains a number of solid papers by an appealing diversity of authors.

The book is divided into two major sections, strategies and practices. Articles in each section are then organized according to the scope of the issues they address—federal, state, or industry. The most interesting chapters examine policies and specific initiatives adopted by several state governments to encourage research and innovation.

When It Hits the Fan: Managing the Nine Crises of Business

By Gerald C. Meyers with John Holusha

Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986, 271 pages, \$17.95

A former chairman of American Motors Corporation (AMC) has teamed up with the Detroit bureau chief of the *New York Times* to write a book that explores crisis management in large corporations. AMC, whose fortunes have been on the decline for many years, is no stranger to corporate crisis. Meyers's book draws on his experiences in the classroom as well as the boardroom. After leaving AMC, he taught a course at Carnegie-Mellon's Graduate School of Industrial Administration, in which prominent executives would recount their efforts to handle major business crises.

The book benefits from a mix of observations by practicing managers and an effort to develop a more formal, academic-style framework. Its one disappointment is the lack of new anecdotes or "war stories" from Meyers's experience or the careers of his CEO lecturers. The case studies, however, seldom get beyond the level of detail available in *Fortune* and *Business Week*.