

Reviews

Tomas Bata, *Knowledge in Action: The Bata System of Management*. (Amsterdam, IOS Press, 1992), Hardback, xvii + 254 pp.

Tomas Bata (1876–1932) came from a family that had practiced the shoemaking craft in Zlin for some three hundred years, beginning with the first-generation cobbler Lukas Batiu (1610–1683). Tomas' early years were characterized by poverty, hardship, repeated business failures, the lack of formal education, and self-doubt about his status in society. Eventually he became a great entrepreneur, founding Bata Enterprises, which had grown to be one of the largest, most efficient, and profitable shoe-manufacturing concerns in the world by the time of his premature death in a plane crash at the age of fifty-six.

To those interested in the history of management theory and practice, Tomas Bata is best known for his Bata system of incentive management, which upholds decentralized organization, departmental autonomy, self-management, profit sharing, long-term employment, reinvestment of earnings, worker's co-ownership of the firm, in-house management education and training. The system considers as a primary company responsibility the quality of the life of the workers (encompassing workplace, health care, housing, and social services) while it disapproves of subsidies, debt, public stock ownership, and unions.

The book, mainly a collection of his reflections and speeches, presents a colorful portrait of the man: a workaholic, a man of action impatient with abstract theorizing, simple and sincere person uninterested in politics or political philosophy (though, ironically, he became Mayor of Zlin), a world traveler, an admirer of Thomas Edison and American freedom and democracy. The core of his ideas was that humans, not capital or machines, are the ultimate source of wealth creation, and each worker must become his own manager through con-

tinual self-help, reliance, learning and improvement of his skills in order to produce prosperity for himself, his community, and the nation. As he put it: "Buildings are just piles of bricks and concrete, and machines a lot of iron and steel. Only people give life to it all."

The Bata system has proven to be a system of universal applicability as it survived its founder's death, socialism, Nazism, and two World Wars; it has flourished even under the most oppressive Communist regime after World War II in the organization of JZD Agrokombinat Slusovice of Czechoslovakia. From the perspective of comparative management, the Bata system is important because it is a prototype of incentive management whose variations are found throughout the world: e.g., the Mondragon Cooperative Federation in Spain, the Scott Bader Commonwealth in Britain, Fletcher Jones Company in Australia, Lincoln Electric in the U.S., and a majority of contemporary Japanese corporations that substantially practice the principles of sharing and joint management-worker sovereignty.

Besides being the originator of the Bata system, Tomas Bata also was something of a guru who tirelessly promoted his faith in the value of dedicated work and service to others as a total philosophy and way of life, and attracted a large number of followers.

The book is meant to introduce Tomas Bata and his thought to a wide English-speaking audience. In view of this intent the book suffers many shortcomings. The quality of the English translation is poor; there are quite a few misspellings, typographic errors, and unclear sentences. The type set is too fine for comfortable reading. Facts and anecdotes are often repeated. The subtitle "The Bata System of Management" is misleading since the book contains no comprehensive articulation of the system.

At the outset the uninitiated reader becomes confused about the nature and origin of the book. Pp. iv and vii seem to suggest that the book was translated by Milan Zeleny. Yet, p. ii indicates that Otilia

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M. Kabesova is the translator. On p. viii one learns that this is an English translation of Anthony Cekota's book, first published in 1986. In his Foreword Cekota does not explain his role in the book. The reader learns by himself, later in the text, that Cekota provides editorial (mostly laudatory) comments on Bata's thoughts. Two different types are used to differentiate Cekota's and Bata's words, but not consistently, so that the reader at times cannot determine whose voice he is listening to. Only on p. 229 does Cekota hint that he was a close associate of Bata; still, he does not disclose the specific nature of the association.

The book suffers because, extensively annotated by a follower, it is neither an unbiased, critical biography of Tomas Bata nor a systematic introduction to his managerial principles. It should have been thoroughly edited by a competent, native English-speaking publisher well acquainted with the targeted market.

Robert S. Ozaki
Department of Economics
California State University
Hayward, CA 94542, USA

Phillips, F.Y. (Ed), *Thinkwork: working, learning and managing in a computer-interactive society*. (London: Praeger, 1992), 279 pp.

The editor's introduction states the aims of this book to be a description of "what [IT innovations] will be on the market sooner rather than later; what the specific needs of various industries are; [and] how [IT] innovations will fit into organisations and society". Although individual papers may address one or another of these topics, with varying degrees of success and in sometimes very different ways, the volume as a whole lacks any coherence.

Many of the papers also adopt an uncritical view of technology which shows little awareness of the social and organizational context within which the information systems of which IT is a part are designed and used. That such anachronistic views are promulgated as the state of the art in thinking on "working, learning and managing in a computer-interactive society" is worrying, both as a sign that little has been learnt from the failures of

the past, and that the social structures that reproduce such ideas continue to be so influential. A review of some of the contributions in this volume may be used to illustrate these criticisms.

The first section is supposedly concerned with organizations. This includes two, thinly-disguised promotional articles for Execucom's "intelligent" EIS package, a discussion of organizational support systems which concludes that "the design of organizations and the design of mechanical information systems have much in common" and a fairly detailed description of a specific Expert System-based programme for supporting managerial intuition. There is also a paper on "the death of office automation" which includes an extended fantasy on the applications of virtual reality for home-shopping. The editor recommends several of these papers as being inspired by the early CSCW conferences. While they certainly talk about all sorts of fancy computer support, they offer only incidental allusions to work practices, cooperative or otherwise.

Part II is entitled "Education and Training". One of the papers describes what sounds like a plan for the State of Texas to prop up various computer companies by installing large amounts of hardware in schools. This, it is suggested, will help to solve the problems which beset the US educational system. Another describes an experimental "intentional learning environment" and the third attempts to review the introduction and impact of advanced manufacturing technology.

Part III is described as addressing communications. It consists of articles from a vice president of Cray Research on advances in supercomputers, another on developments in network information services, a discussion of trends in computer-mediated communications (which includes another virtual reality fantasy) and the text of the European Community's "Green Paper on the Development of the Common Market in Telecommunications Services and Equipment: Report on the State of Implementation".

Part IV, "Computers and Computing", includes another report on advances in supercomputers (this time from the Chairman of CONVEX); a technical paper from a Japanese researcher describing, in some detail, the design principles (with relevant

algebraic formulae) of an “autonomous decentralized system”; and an article on developments in healthcare computing.

Given the extremely disparate nature of the various contributions, all but five of which, we are told, were specifically written for this volume, we may seriously question what it is trying to achieve. Who are the potential readers? For the layperson, the highly variable level of detail at which the chapters address the topics and the lack of any coherent overview of developments will make it a poor introduction to the subject, while for the expert many of the topics will seem trivialized and the predictions largely unsubstantiated. The predictions also rapidly become out-of-date, either because they are overtaken by events (as is the case with recent developments in high-speed silicon chips), or because developments take a different path. What you end up with is the equivalent of 1940s “Boy’s Own Stories” of life in the 1990s.

At one level these deficiencies are perhaps harmless, even if they undermine the credibility of the book. At another, however, they disguise the darker side of the technological determinism on which they are based. This is particularly evident in two of the papers. The first is intentional and occurs in the communications fantasy, where the dangers of the panoptic potential of IT are shown when the hero’s friend is revealed to be a virtual reality outlaw, on the run from the corporation that now controls world information flows. The second is presumably unintentional and occurs in the chapter on healthcare computing where a major niche market is described as “identifying physicians whose practice patterns are inconsistent with their patients’ reimbursement capability”. Penalizing doctors who give poor people the treatment they need may be a fact of life in “marketized” medicine, but to pursue such objectives unquestioningly, ignores the moral choices that are being made. While each of us may reach different decisions on such issues, we are ill-served by viewpoints that pretend the choices do not exist.

Matthew Jones
Judge Institute of Management Studies
Cambridge University
Cambridge, CB2 1RX
UK

S.K., Chakraborty, *Managerial Transformation by Values: A Corporate Pilgrimage* (Sage: Newbury Park, Cal, London & New Delhi, 1992).

Increasingly, research into culture-specific management styles and techniques is providing unique insights into the behaviour and environmental climate of managers. Chakraborty, in *Managerial Transformation by Values: A Corporate Pilgrimage*, reveals how an Indian – primarily rooted in the Hindu tradition – value-based workshop can promote and enhance managerial effectiveness. His study focuses on one company’s (Godrej and Boyce Manufacturing Co Ltd) successful adaptation of ‘the timeless elements of classic Indian psycho-philosophy’ for all its employees from the top down. Using this modern industrial company as his example, Chakraborty attempts to synthesize ‘Indian ethos-Western technology’ as done previously, with much success, in the ‘Japanese ethos-Western technology’ synergy.

One of the strengths of this account of ‘managerial transformation by values’ is that it homes in upon an important fact: one’s philosophical heritage does shape behaviour and this, by inference, can influence performance. It is interesting to note, however, that the Indian managers conscious of this fact tended to be those which were fairly westernized in background and education. Conservative or orthodox Indians were already in tune with their philosophical heritage so it was not a discovery for them during the workshop, it was noted. Thus, the importance of Indian values remained undiminished for Indian managers in spite of its renaissance or lack thereof.

Chakraborty’s analysis of the program and its results are documented in a straight-forward and interesting manner. Correspondence between the author and the workshop’s participants (which comprises approximately 30% of the study) is included along with questionnaire response, and qualitative as well as quantitative assessments. Along with this interesting format, Chakraborty provides the reader with a balanced view of Indian philosophy and thought. He indicates that while the Indian philosophical tradition espouses a belief in the helplessness of the individual with respect of his/her *karmas*, this does not and should not pre-

vent a manager from taking the initiative, when appropriate.

At times, his account proves to be somewhat repetitive, as indicated by the recurring letters which discuss Indian concepts (*karma*, *samsara*, and *chakras*, to name a few). Defining these concepts at the onset or perhaps in a glossary would be helpful to the western reader and those not familiar with Indian philosophy. The account also fails to address some of the problems which inspired the workshop in the first place. These managerial issues, however standard or obvious, need to be discussed in the light of the 'solutions' which are presented.

Another important consideration is the definition of Indian philosophy. While in the case of Japanese value-based systems homogeneity is the norm, Indian values and society are harder to generalize. Approximately 20% of the Indian population is non-Hindu, consisting primarily of Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Jains and Parsis, each group having its own value-based system. Therefore, Indian values can mean different things to different people. Does the author now see the development of a pan-Indian value-system?

Does a happier individual make a better manager? According to the workshop's participants, Indian mediation/yoga/philosophical techniques ultimately improved the overall quality of their private lives as well as their working relationships. Chakraborty, however, does not elaborate upon the impact of his workshop on actual corporate performance.

Managerial Transformation by Values may be of interest to researchers in the field of international management with a focus on cultural issues. It lacks the operational clarity, however, to recommend it for practitioners in general.

Niti Dubey Villinger
Centre for International Management
Judge Institute of Managerial Studies
University of Cambridge
Cambridge CB2 1RX
UK

Elizabeth C. Hirschman and Morris B. Holbrook, *Postmodern Consumer Research: The Study of Consumption as Text* (Sage, Newbury Park, California, 1992, 146 p., £26.50 hbk, £12.95 pbk.).

Hirschman and Holbrook provide a brief but in-depth profile of the differing epistemological positions that are adopted in the pursuit of consumer research. The first part of the book is devoted to the philosophical perspectives under consideration namely: empiricism (subdivided into logical and commonsense variants); socioeconomic constructionism (Marxism, Mannheim's Sociology of Knowledge, ethnomethodology and genetic structuralism); interpretivism (hermeneutics, semiotics and structural criticism); subjectivism (phenomenology and existentialism); and rationalism (Fichte-Kant). The methods of applying each of the five given perspectives to consumer research are explored in the second part of the volume. The final chapters deal with the authors' appeal for greater academic tolerance from those who exclusively advocate one epistemological position whilst dismissing the others.

In dealing with the philosophical perspectives, the authors give a concise introduction to the elements in the various perspectives of interest to consumer researchers. The later chapters on methodology profile pathfinding works, each of which has been informed by one of the given perspectives. These summaries provide lucid and careful briefings about the complexities endemic in putting perspectives into practice.

An indication of the scope and flavour of the book is given in the final chapter:

"We advocate an acceptance of the acknowledgement that perspectives varying between the extremes of Material and Mental Determinism can all attain high levels of internal coherence and external relevance to the various realities constructed by interpretive communities."

Though Hirschman and Holbrook consider epistemological positions in the arena of consumer research, their work is of value to a wider academic community. Although short, the book is highly detailed with definitions and ideas. Furthermore, the authors have taken care to provide the less ex-

perienced researcher with a short list of further reading.

Dominic WRING
Judge Institute of Management Studies
Cambridge University
Cambridge, CB2 1RX
UK

Alan Vaux, Margaret S. Stockdale, Michael J. Schwerin (eds.), *Independent Consulting For Evaluators* (Newbury Park, California and London, 1992, 221 p.).

For a considerable length of time now, participants in a wide range of fields ranging from applied psychology to organisational development have been involved in applying their knowledge and experience in a commercial environment as consultants. Few of these people, however, receive much in the way of formal teaching or training which focuses on helping them to develop practical applied skills which prepares them to operate effectively as consultants.

Vaux, Stockdale and Schwerin present an interesting collection of papers written by a number of experts with hands-on consulting experience which aims to redress some of the imbalance between learning and application in the field of applied psychology. The editors set themselves a number of objectives, but principally assume the task of assisting the reader in understanding and developing the less tangible skills required to operate effectively as consultants. The book is aimed primarily at teachers, students and new professionals in fields relating to applied psychology, including program evaluators, organisational psychologists, and organisational development consultants; however, anyone who is involved in applying theory to practice will find the material of more than passing interest.

In the first section, the authors present three papers dealing with applied training for evaluators and the complications which arise when evaluators have to assume multiple professional roles. Downey and Kuhnert's chapter on developing and running internship programmes will appeal to a smaller part of the book's audience while Saal's

chapter on multiple roles is a most interesting and succinct discussion of what is one of the most pressing issues in consulting today. Leong's paper on the problems which arise when combining both research and consultation roles fits in well with Saal's discussion in further developing the issue of role conflict.

In the second section, the focus for discussion shifts towards exploring the relationship between consultant and client. Cristiani presents a lucid if uninspired look at how consultants should approach the development of solid working relationships with their clients. Barrington's chapter on politics and power within a client-consultant relationship presents an excellent account of the many facets of political intrigue which a modern consultant needs to be aware of if he is to be successful. While Jennings' chapter on multiculturalism is to be commended for dealing with a most important issue, its appearance here seems somewhat incongruous with the other papers.

Part three moves on to look at more practical aspects of consulting. Kuhnert and Gore's look at the importance of contracts, while not without interest to some readers, is again a little incongruous with the other material and, in my view, does not fit sufficiently comfortably with the fairly widespread use of standardised terms and conditions by many of today's consultants. McKillip and Stephenson's paper on using government information services is perhaps a little too specific in its coverage to appeal to the mass readership and also is not well placed within the context of the other papers. The reader will find a lot that is of interest, however, in Henry's look at the use of graphical displays and Roberts-Gray's look at reports and presentation.

In the fourth and final section, the editors present two case studies of consulting organisations in an attempt to reinforce the messages contained within the rest of the book. However, neither Larson and Brownell's look at a commercial organisation nor Vaux and Stockdale's look at a graduate student-based consulting centre manage to sufficiently achieve this aim. It would perhaps have been both more powerful and more appropriate to have presented detailed case studies of consulting projects than of consulting organisations.

Independent Consulting for Evaluators sets itself the difficult task of presenting an overview of the many issues, processes and skills which are involved when applying particular fields of expertise within a consulting environment. While the editors achieve their objectives to a significant degree, the inclusion of several chapters which do not sit comfortably amongst the other papers affects the overall flow of the work and the book would benefit from some re-organisation and perhaps a more specific focus. Nevertheless, it is a generally well written and useful starting point for anyone interested in consult-

ing. I would recommend it not only to the audience to which it is specifically targeted, but also to any student or researcher in the wider realm of management and organisational science who is interested or involved in practical consultation.

Mark Powell
Judge Institute of Management Science
University of Cambridge
Cambridge, CB2 1RX
UK