

himself contributes a chapter. It is not on the VSM, but on his idea of 'tensegrity'—an icosahedron model for the working of a team. In the applications section, David Schecter describes how this idea has been used in Pacific Bell.

In summary, this book shows that the theory of the VSM is continuing to grow, develop and be used. It can help us to understand the structural requirements of methods such as continuous improvement and business system re-engineering. Its general development in the direction of a more theoretically-based understanding of 'conversations' within an organization, that is a 'multisystem', is a fruitful one. I recommend this book to anyone interested in how organizations can adapt and become more effective.

Finally, the question is what seems to be the status of Beer's original project—i.e. to show that organization according to the principles of the VSM is both necessary and sufficient for viability? It seems that, for a system composed of human beings, it is necessary but not sufficient. A human system is a machine, many of the components of which are human beings. For it to work effectively, components must do the jobs assigned to them, but how can this be ensured in the case of human components? These will and must debate, negotiate and renegotiate with one another exactly which machine they are willing to operate. Thus, although individuals' and sub-units' power to do anything positive within the system is constrained by the organization that management has set up, they always have the negative power to wreck it. It is because VSM theorists increasingly recognize the importance of the human factor that the study of the VSM continues to be a vital source of theoretical developments and applications.

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### Reference

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### Practitioner's Guide to Quality and Process Improvement

ADEDEJI B. BADIRU and BABATUNDE J. AYENI

*Chapman and Hall, London, 1993. xii + 353 pp. £35.00*

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This book is designed to be a practical guidebook for professionals in the area of quality improvement. The first chapter provides a general management discussion of quality issues (with summaries of the contributions of the main 'gurus' including Deming, Taguchi and Crosby). This is a useful and very readable overview of the area.

The remaining chapters provide more detailed advice on implementing a programme of quality improvement. The main emphasis is on project management and statistical approaches, whereas I found the coverage of the other implementation issues somewhat superficial in places.

For example, 'An organisation should do the following in order to increase employee involvement in quality improvement: establish quality awareness programs; listen to employees . . .'. This is perhaps a useful checklist but does not really provide a step-by-step guide to implementation.

Conversely, the statistical and technical aspects of quality improvement are given a much more thorough treatment. My only criticism of this part of the book would be an apparent bias towards a manufacturing environment, rather than a service environment. For example, customer surveys merit only half a page's treatment.

Overall, this is a competent review of the subject of process improvement, and definitely provides a more 'business focused' treatment than many purely statistical process control textbooks.

*Forward Trust*

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