Book review

The Component-based Business: Plug and Play

BY R VERYARD

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It is not often that I read a book with such a challenging diversity of viewpoints; however, this is one such occasion. The subject matter of Veryard's book is hard to pin down; is it a business book using an information systems metaphor or an information systems book using a business metaphor? I had to ask that question several times during my first reading. The book is, in the final analysis, the former as the author states in the Introduction. The book provides an insight into the business world from a deconstructivist viewpoint. Each chosen business aspect is analysed as a set of building blocks from which a new and more flexible whole may be created. These building blocks are often compared to the components of software systems thus fixing the intended audience as business information systems practitioners.

In the opening chapter we are shown the evolution of this approach from early industrial manufacturing processes, with examples chosen from Whitney's gun assembly plant and the bicycle industry. We are taken from the industrial revolution to more recent thoughts on the structure of the brain, where there is a wide-ranging tour of the applicability of the building block approach and a variety of perspectives on componentry. It also sets the style for the following chapters which is, at times, somewhat infuriating! The body of the work examines systems, both large and small, as if they are constructed from building blocks and the principles governing the design of these components. His discussion of character and intelligence within systems takes us away from the technologists' strictly functional view to the broader systems landscape that he develops admirably in the later chapters. The author reminds us that it is often at the interfaces that we can develop new products and that it is the appropriateness of fit that makes this approach succeed or fail. The flow of the book is regularly broken by references to a very diverse collection of examples that can cause us to view yet further perspectives on the advocated approach, yet it is this diversity that can lead us to lose sight of the main focus of the work. Each section contains thought-provoking questions and discussion points which the academic community could simply transmute into forms of assessment. We are offered a related website, www.component-based-business.com for further examples and materials plus an open forum for discussion.

The overall impression is of an excellent book on the subject of component-based business which should be on the recommended reading list for students studying business information systems and related fields such as e-commerce. For professionals in the field we are reminded of the need to look at our world in the broadest sense, that of an organic and shifting environment with which we need to interact appropriately; this book is well worth a place on our bookshelves.

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