

Stafford Beer and viable systems in the XXI century

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The extraordinary expansion of Internet has intensified a series of technological, methodological and social problems, whose solutions are necessary to realize its potentials. In addition to increasing “the intellect” of Business Internet Portals (see “IT strategy for the XXI Century” paper - <http://www.ototsky.mgn.ru/it/OSJmenu.htm>) the problem of increasing the complexity of “artifacts” in different areas of human activities is becoming more significant. Their complexity, their actual capabilities and development, is surpassing the scope envisaged by their creators. IT decisions to decrease man-hours for creating and supporting systems are being investigated in “all fronts”. An examples is IBM’s Autonomic Computing approach, which facilitates and automates many system management tasks currently done by humans (<http://www.zurich.ibm.com/pdf/ebizz/idd-ac.pdf>). The “first league of ERP vendors” (SAP and Oracle) are creating strong analytical tools to support more viable enterprises. Examples are Oracle’s Business Activity Monitoring - <http://www.oracle.com/appserver/business-activity-monitoring.html>) and SAP’s Strategic Enterprise Management - <http://www.sap.com/solutions/business-suite/erp/sapsem.epx>). Many features of Stafford Beer’s Viable System Model (VSM) such as real-time alerts, self-healing, self-protection, self-adaptation, graphical dashboards, are emerging in these new systems. More immediately related to the VSM is the new software “the Viable Software” of Charles Herring - <http://charles-herring.com/Thesis/ViableSoftware.pdf> . Current technologies are making possible implementing VSM ideas, in ways that were only a dream 30 years ago in Chile, at the time of the implementation of Cybersyn project. ICTs, such as Internet mobile devices and wire free communication networks are capable of creating “virtual” distributed ‘operation rooms’, which were at the “heart” of the Cybersyn project. A first initiative for the creation of operations rooms in Russia started after the translation of Beer’s book “Brain of the Firm” in 1993. However, some important analog features of Cybersyn’s decision support systems [1] were not always considered (http://ototsky.mgn.ru/it/vsm_in_russia.htm) . Today, there is a new wave of interest in Russia to use the “instrumental” heritage of Stafford Beer. An examples is the Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology pilot project for a Russian National Innovation System (NIS) – <http://sim-mfti.a133.nthosting.ru/content/?fl=415&doc=1151> .

. A reference prototype for this project is a similar project in New Zealand, which has been inspired by the Viable System Model (<http://nzae.org.nz/files/%2322-DEVINE.PDF>). Many more, similarly influenced, activities can be found at the Cybernetic Society of the UK’s website (<http://www.cybsoc.org/contacts/people-Beer.htm>).

However, in my view, the Cybersyn project has a deeper significance for the future mankind than

merely its “instrumental capabilities”. At that time a new State was being developed in Chile. It was strongly inspired by autonomy and flexibility, contrary to the bureaucratic hierarchy of the Soviet system. But it was also far more inspiring than the market oriented structures of the so called Western democracies. In Beer’s view “the rich man’s world” did not understand what was good cybernetics. He wrote in the early 90s [2]: “If Soviet communism accepted its own demise, Western capitalism has yet to accept it”. A deeper analysis of the Cybersyn project could help rethinking the future of mankind. It is not accidental that in today’s Chile there is a great interest in Cybersyn, after the demise of Pinochet’s market oriented dictatorship. The new generations are recovering the experience of 30 years ago. Chilean multimedia artists are about to revisit their own inspired view of the Cybersyn project (<http://www.cybersyn.cl/ingles/cybersyn/index.html>). This experience could be very helpful not only for Chile, not only for Russia, but for all of mankind.

References

1. *Stafford Beer* , “Fanfare for Effective Freedom” (Cybernetic Praxis in Government), 1973, www.williambowles.info/sa/FanfareforEffectiveFreedom.pdf
2. *Stafford Beer* , “World in Torment”, 1992 – <http://www.staffordbeer.com/papers/World%20in%20Torment.pdf>