

Educational implications of developments in Information Technology within an Industrial context

‘Soft Systems approach’

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Abstract

In a previous paper (June 1984), I argued that there is a need, in relation to ‘Socio-physical systems’ of the world- of which Industrial Training System is one, to develop a model of research which is ‘holistic’, capable of handling changes and applied.

This paper rest on the proposition that we understand too little and too late the way in which changes in technology interact with organisational, learning, ethical and industrial relation systems and vice versa; and that the gap in understanding reflects two kinds of theoretical deficiencies. These are a lack of substantive theory about the subject matter and far more restricting the lack of methodological framework for investigating it.

This paper is a primary exploration of the idea of applying the Soft System Approach most closely associated with C W Churchman Sir Geoffery Vickers and Peter Checkland. This approach was developed largely in the context of organisations at a higher level of complexity (Commercial, Political Services).

This kind of approach differs from other methods which have been extensively used in this general area, that is; from the non-sytemic social science type researches, that, while useful in some other respects, they are not very helpful in the context of complex organisations. This approach also differs from the functionalist hard system type studies in that it can also take into consideration ‘qualitative’ information.

This paper sets out to suggest what the chief characteristics of a Soft Systems Approach would be, when applied to this kind of research, and what substantive and methodological learning might emerge from it.

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