

Mimicking nature could help business survive the credit crunch

As credits crunch, recession bites, and business struggle to stay primed, researchers in Spain suggest that a more surgical approach to management and business practice is needed if a company is to survive. Writing in the *International Journal of Management Practice* from Inderscience Publishers, the team explains how businesses could take a cue from nature to them restructure.

Palmira López-Fresno of "STIGA" in Barcelona is working with Fernando Fernández-González of the Hospital Central de Asturias in Oviedo to demonstrate how a process analogous to apoptosis, or programmed cell death, could help companies, and organisations, such as hospitals, removed malfunctioning or ineffective parts of their business and operations and so prevent the spread of commercial decay that could spread throughout an organisation and lead ultimately to its demise.

Programmed cell death, known in biological circles as apoptosis, is a natural process in which damaged, diseased, or otherwise unwanted cells are stimulated to undergo spontaneous self destruction. Apoptosis is a very useful process. Under normal conditions, it models the foetus, allowing growing fingers to separate for form tiny hands, for instance. Apoptosis also allows the body to eradicate errant cells that could be destructive if left to their own devices. It also keeps cell replication in check and prevents the kind of runaway cell replication that would otherwise lead to cancer.

López-Fresno and Fernández-González explain that Business Process Reengineering (BPR) has become a fashionable and effective approach to increasing productivity through reduced process time and cost, improved quality, and greater customer satisfaction. The core emphasis of BPR is the fundamental rethinking and radical redesign of business process to achieve dramatic improvements in critical areas, they say.

However, BPR is not a panacea. The researchers add that implementing BPR is not only complex but does not guarantee good results, unless both success and failure factors are taken into account. They point out that if an organisation overlooks localised failures within, then lack of motivation, loss of credibility, financial breakdown, and other issues can spread like diseased tissue cause widespread problems and ultimately kill a business.

To stop the rot, López-Fresno and Fernández-González suggest that business adopt apoptosis as a standard procedure within the organisation. Improvements and self-protective systems can be introduced, which they refer to as "structured and virtual mechanisms". These are embedded into each part or process within the organisation and will trigger at a specific moment, when conditions approach a tipping point, the programmed removal of that particular part or process. The assessment of a negative tipping point is based on ongoing risk assessment and validation of productivity as well as other factors. The result will be the localised programmed death of only the malfunctioning part or process.

As components processes, units, departments lose relevance and efficacy then an approach based on the biological principle of apoptosis means self-sacrifice for specific parts of the business, which may cut to the core of those people involved, but will protect the organisation as a whole and could even save its life.

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