

BOOK REVIEWS

proprioceptive sensible in invertebrates. Satir and Christensen review work in primary (9 + 0) cilia and point out that much of the molecular insight in this area has origins in work on *Chlamydomonas*, *C. elegans* and *Tetrahymena*.

Cilia operate in the viscous regime of low Reynolds numbers and their mechanics has been extensively studied. While ciliary mechanics is not reviewed in this volume, the regulation of ciliary beating has been reviewed, as have diseases associated with ciliary malfunction.

The reviews also feature a special section on β -arrestins, which were originally identified as proteins that desensitized second-messenger signalling initiated by seven transmembrane receptors that couple to GTP-binding proteins. A collection of five reviews introduces the reader to a variety of functions of these proteins that had not been imagined at the time of identification – signalling, especially in regulating the actin cytoskeleton during processes such as chemotaxis; the endocytosis of transmembrane receptors; their involvement as bona-fide signalling molecules both in G-protein-mediated cascades and in other systems; and their involvement in mediating crosstalk between G-protein and receptor tyrosine kinase systems. *In vivo* studies on genetically modified mice are also reviewed.

The *Annual Review* series has maintained its tradition of presenting timely and extensive reviews, enhanced over the past decade with excellent illustrations. This volume will be referred to often, and with pleasure, for a long time.

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Blind Men and the Elephant: Demystifying the Global IT Services Industry.

Was Rahman and Priya Kurien. Sage Publications India Pvt Ltd, B1/11, Mohan Cooperative Industrial Area, Mathura Road, New Delhi 110 044. 2007. 317 pp. Price: Rs 395.

The book, *Blind Men and the Elephant: Demystifying the Global IT Services Industry*, was sent to me for a possible review. I applied the same test to this book that I apply to any book before deciding if I want to buy it or not: read the first

chapter. In this case, the first chapter is Chapter 0 and I found that it presented an interesting and intriguing picture of the book. I agreed to review the book.

The next four months saw an epic struggle between my sense of duty that was piling on the guilt for not having completed the review and my reading mind that found it impossible to read through the next two chapters of the book. The breakthrough happened when, triggered by persistent reminders from *Current Science* that I complete the review, I decided to skip a few chapters. Then my progress was rapid. So let me first instruct the reader of this review on how to get the best out of the book.

Read chapter 0 first to get a good motivational overview of the book. The conflicts and paradoxes in the IT services industry are well brought out. Then move to chapter 4, and read in sequence till the end of chapter 6. These three chapters present a quick overview of the history of business computing, and are among the most interesting chapters of the book and the most informative. The relatively unknown origins of the IT services industry at the UK-based Lyons teashop family business makes compelling reading, as well as lays the foundation for understanding the industry today.

Now, go back to chapter 3, the best chapter of this book and a must read for anyone connected with the IT services industry. A sample of the text will convey the directness with which the reality of the industry is being addressed: ‘...Why does IT consume billions of dollars of customers’ money, often to replace obsolete systems that only a few years previously were touted as the ultimate answer to business problems? Why do customers allow people who have never managed a business like theirs to fundamentally change parts of their organizations on the basis of presentations and promises that things will run much better?’.

Proceed to chapter 8, a good summary of the top-three IT services companies in the world. Tracing the historic evolution of these three very different companies is helpful in understanding the complexities of the industry today. The rest of the book can be read quickly by browsing through chapters 1 and 2 and reading the remaining chapters 9 through 12 in order. Of course, I read the entire book before arriving at the above set of instructions.

There are three key problems with the book that reduce its impact. First, the target audience, for obvious reasons, is difficult to pin down and hence the authors lose their way in many places. At some places they assume the reader knows nothing about IT and a few paragraphs later they address an industry veteran.

It is neither a textbook, since it is subjective and speculative at many places, nor is it an authoritative reference, since there are many gross simplifications. For example, the early success of the IT services companies in India is attributed to the facts of historic affinity of Indians to mathematics and logic, and the presence of famed universities like Nalanda. There is no mention of the key factor, the dollar–rupee arbitrage and the resulting very low cost to customers in the US. There is no mention of efforts of early pioneers of the Indian industry, who used this cost advantage to slowly claw their way up the value chain. The book hardly touches upon the two core facets of the top Indian IT services companies: their astounding HR management expertise and impressive software development processes, that take as input a large number of graduates from any discipline and with diverse levels of skills, and deliver high quality, predictable, low-cost software services as output.

The second problem is simpler to address, and that is verbosity. The real insights from this book, and there are several, could have been packed in a book half its size. The third problem is that it leaves the reader hanging loose at the end of the book: richer with valuable insights and facts about the global IT industry, but as mystified as at the start.

In spite of these problems, the book should be read by anyone with more than a passing interest in the IT services industry. The book is especially accessible and valuable to decision makers in both government and industry in India at the current juncture, when hundreds of crores of taxpayers money is being spent to create IT solutions across diverse domains.

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