

THE LEGACY OF STAFFORD BEER AND MANAGEMENT CYBERNETICS

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Sixty years ago, a young man named Stafford Beer wrote to Norbert Wiener to say 'I think I am a cybernetician'. Correspondence and meetings ensued, and Stafford was inspired by both the technical possibilities in Wiener's work and the sense of social conscience that was evident in his *The Human Use of Human Beings*. Stafford was very proud when Norbert Wiener declared that if he could be considered the father of cybernetics, then Stafford could be considered the father of management cybernetics.

Stafford was among many in the field whose beginnings were in what is now considered to be operational research during World War II. From there, Stafford went into the British steel industry where he began building neurological and set theoretic models of processes. This work led to the Viable System Model that nominates the necessary management functions that correspond to functions in the human nervous system. He went on to apply the VSM in a number of settings – the most famous of which was the work done under Salvador Allende's presidency in Chile. Stafford next developed the Team Syntegrity process that uses cybernetic ideas of variety and heterarchy to bring multiple perspectives together to determine a common future.

The juncture of methodologies and attention to the notions of ethics and justice that informed both men is a legacy that is valuable and useful to carry our work forward into a future with challenges that were identified and foreseen by both men.