

Living organisations

I've been reading "transferring tacit knowledge in extended enterprises" by Nousala et al. Yes, yes, I know, but it's useful for work. So today's thought is "how far can we take the organisation as organism analogy?". The paper picks up on a previously popular theme, that organisations (companies, cities, any complex set of interacting people) can usefully be modelled as if they are living organisms. Which includes concepts like autopoiesis - how do we know when something is alive, and rather more Popperian theory than I've seen since I was last at university.

Now I have a soft spot for the independence of mitochondria - the idea that something as complex as a human can contain cells that are not only doing their own thing, but just happen to be hanging around in the neighbourhood. But I digress. What is perhaps more important is the question "is a company a cat or a big shaggy dog?". Does it exist on its own terms and selfishly decide its own fate, or hang around with its tongue sticking out waiting for someone to throw a stick for it? If a company like that is a dog, then how come dogs manage to survive? And can I use the caveman analogy now, that the dog-human symbiosis evolved because dogs were a really good early-warning system and hence worth being fed by the humans.

I really really want to explore these ideas, I have a dozen others hanging around them, some serious, some not-so-serious, but I can't. I've had my one thought for today. And this is hard, so terribly terribly hard. But I'll sit on my hands now and keep trying to reach for that elusive simplicity, that golden possibility of clearer communication. Aargh.