Systems, Experts, and Computers: The Systems Approach in Management and Engineering, World War II and After (Dibner Institute Studies in the History of Science and Technology)

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After World War II, a systems approach to solving complex problems and managing complex systems came into vogue among engineers, scientists, and managers, fostered in part by the diffusion of digital computing power. Enthusiasm for the approach peaked during the Johnson administration, when it was applied to everything from military command and control systems to poverty in American cities. Although its failure in the social sphere, coupled with increasing skepticism about the role of technology and "experts" in American society, led to a retrenchment, systems methods are still part of modern managerial practice.

This groundbreaking book charts the origins and spread of the systems movement. It describes the major players including RAND, MITRE, Ramo-Wooldrige (later TRW), and the International Institute of Applied Systems Analysis--and examines applications in a wide variety of military, government, civil, and engineering settings. The book is international in scope, describing the spread of systems thinking in France and Sweden. The story it tells helps to explain engineering thought and managerial practice during the last sixty years.

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