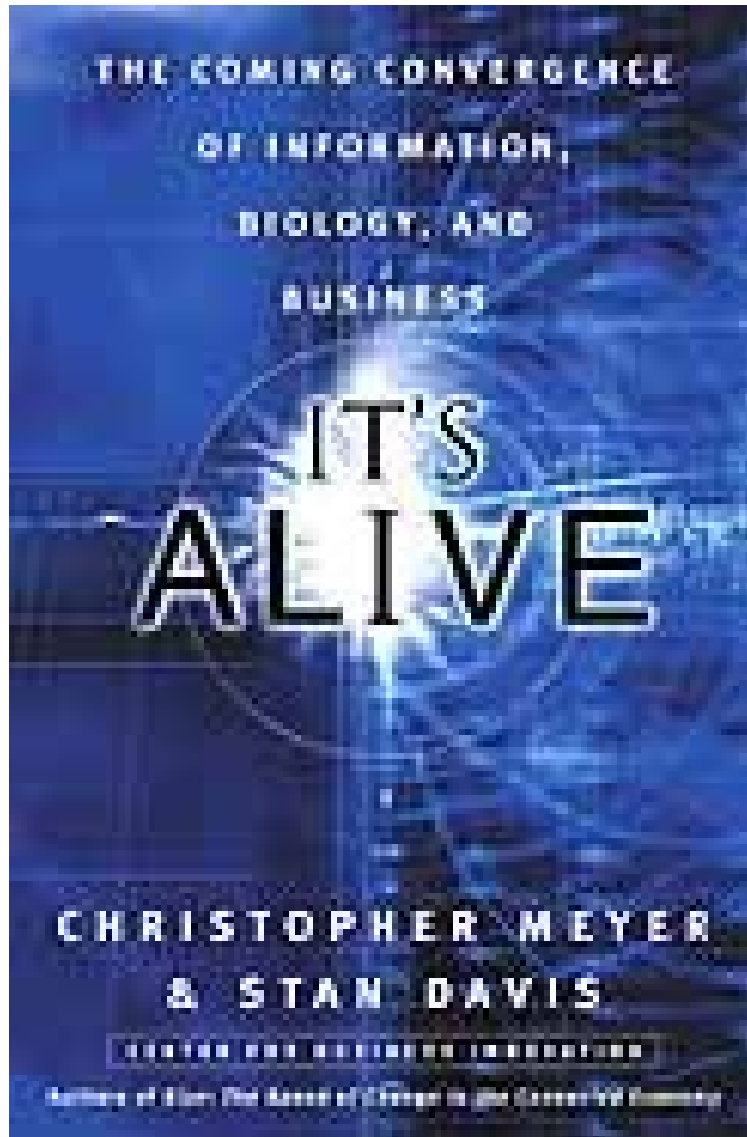


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# It's Alive: The Coming Convergence of Information, Biology, and Business

*Chris Meyer, Stan Davis*

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**Chris Meyer, Stan Davis : It's Alive: The Coming Convergence of Information, Biology, and Business** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised It's Alive: The Coming Convergence of Information, Biology, and Business:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. This convergence between our undstanding of Biology and Business is the most amazing progress in human understanding.By RexThe use of the Sense, Respond and React

framework to comprehend the dynamics of a living organism or a company can guide a manager or entrepreneur to develop the most elegant and sustainable businesses. It may sound arrogant from my side, but when I first read this book some years ago I was a bit angry that I had not written it myself. So many of these concepts were already in my mind but Stan Davis and Christopher Meyer were the ones who elegantly put them together for us all to enjoy, so congratulations to them!

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Abstract, provocative but pragmatic  
By Ingo Leung  
Compared with Davis Meyer's excellent 1998 work 'Blur', the theme concept of 'It's Alive' is much more abstract provocative. 'The coming convergence of information, biology, business' sounds like another 'management fad'; but as I enjoy 'Blur' very much, I gave the book a try realized that my initial impression was wrong. Davis Meyer managed to vividly elaborate their theme, with real-world examples coherent arguments. I find their work to be highly pragmatic in guiding visionary leaders to shape their organization into an adaptable one.

22 of 24 people found the following review helpful. A Look at the Future from the Laboratories of Today  
By Donald Mitchell  
It's Alive has an unusual perspective. The authors argue that the valuable innovations of the next ten years are being developed in the research laboratories and advanced developments of organizations and companies today. The template is looking backward at Xerox's Palo Alto Research Center in 1971 as a way to have gotten a preview of today's computer-connected society. The book will primarily appeal to those with an interest in applying complexity science and biological analogies through information technology to large organizations. Most of the applications here require tens of millions of dollars to do. So for those in small organizations, the examples will seem out-of-reach. The main advantage of this book over similar books is that it has more and more contemporary examples and a further development of its concepts than the predecessors that I have read. From looking at technological developments that are available now and those that are in process, Christopher Meyer and Stan Davis see the maturing of the information technology revolution occurring at the same time as the commercialization of various "molecular" technologies (such as nanotechnology, biotechnology and materials science). Because the two fields operate conceptually in similar ways, the authors point to a convergence that has begun between the two fields that will probably grow in the future. They also draw key lessons from the way that evolutionary biology operates to prescribe for business organizations in the future.

Here's the book's structure:  
Introduction  
Part I The Next Ten Years  
Chapter 1 Economic Evolution: Learning from Life Cycles  
Part II Code Is Code  
Chapter 2 General Evolution: Learning from Nature  
Chapter 3 Biology and the World of the Molecule  
Chapter 4 Information and the World of Bits  
Part III The Adaptive Enterprise  
Chapter 5 Adaptive Management  
Chapter 6 Seed, Select, and Amplify at Capital One  
Chapter 7 Breeding Early and Often at the U.S. Marine Corps  
Chapter 8 Creating the Capacity to Respond at BP  
Chapter 9 Born Adaptive at Maxygen  
Chapter 10 Becoming an Adaptive Enterprise  
Part IV Convergence  
Chapter 11 The Adjacent Possible

To me, the most interesting parts of the book involved advanced experiments and applications of technology to solve problems. Most of these I had not read about before. For the most part, these are written in ways that a lay person can easily follow. The organizational examples were helpful to applying the concepts of an adaptive enterprise. Apply the six memes (gene-like qualities of ideas) for managing: Self-organize; recombine; sense and respond; learn and adapt; seed, select, and amplify; destabilize. Of the organizational examples, I found the Capital One and Maxygen examples the easiest to understand. The BP and U.S. Marine Corps examples seemed a little sketchy. My favorite example in the entire book was of artist Eduardo Kac turning Genesis 1:28 into Morse code and translating the results into a DNA sequence. He then had the sequence inserted into live bacteria, and displayed the bacteria publicly where viewers could zap the bacteria with UV to create potential mutations. Now, that's technological convergence!

The book ends with some speculation about new applications of convergent technologies such as matter compilers, personal hospitals, universal individual lifelong mentors, experience machines and social-science stimulators. Don't let the book's conceptual structure scare you off. Underneath the new definitions and concepts, there's a lot of common sense that most will agree with: Get experience fast; learn from your experience; keep it simple; be agile; get to the most valuable places first with the most; and communicate in all directions. After you've finished reading the book, I suggest you think about how the book's principles could be accomplished on a shoe-string by an organization that you know well. In that way, you will play a valuable role in being a commercializer of advanced laboratory results.

Why we are on the cusp of a new economic era that will make the changes and challenges of the Information Era seem like child's play. From the bestselling authors of *Blur*; a defining book of the Information Age; comes a startling glimpse into the near future and the emerging economy that awaits us. *It's Alive* foretells the jolt the world is about to receive as the science of molecular evolution races out of the laboratories and into the business world. Think back to the early 1970s. Imagine the opportunities for your business, career choice, and investments had you received an advance report on the ways in which computer and information technology would revolutionize the world. *It's Alive* provides that opportunity today: a realistic and persuasive look into the future; the molecular economy; and how it is starting to overtake and reshape the Information Age. Today's gene mapping and molecular engineering are equivalent to the introduction of transistor radios at the advent of the information economy. Solid-state technology moved from the labs into the business arena, providing in turn the transistor, the microprocessor, and the modem; and the information business. During the next ten years,

molecular technology will follow the same pattern, moving from the lab and into the basic operation of the corporation itself. Chris Meyer and Stan Davis are our guides in understanding this new future. They show that not only biological systems evolve. The rules of evolution help explain the process of change in biology, business, and the economy, thereby providing a management guide to the business world around the corner. It's Alive is not science fiction or futurism. It bases its insights and predictions on the impact the molecular economy is already having in such diverse business environments as manufacturing, financial services, and energy. Through in-depth case studies of Capital One Financial, the U.S. Marine Corps, British Petroleum, and the biotech firm Maxygen, Meyer and Davis show how adaptive behavior works in the real world. As the rules of evolution combine with the connected economy, our business world will become unpredictable, volatile, and continually adaptivemdash;in other words, alive. Also available as an eBook. From the Hardcover edition.

From Publishers Weekly The hackneyed trope of businesses as organisms in an economic ecosystem is updated in this informative but puffed-up volume of management theory. According to Meyer and Davis, authors of the New Economy manifesto *Blur: The Speed of Change in the Connected Economy*, the next big thing will be a "molecular economy"-biotechnology, nanotechnology and materials science-based on biological processes or things that mimic them. They spend several chapters on a tour of up-and-coming technologies, but their interest in them is mainly as avatars of a new managerial zeitgeist. In a coming age of unprecedented "volatility," businesses must abandon efforts to craft the perfect plan for the future and engineer the environment, and should instead embrace an evolutionary paradigm of "adaptive management" based on biological principles. Successful organizations must "self-organize" instead of relying on command-and-control, "recombine" best practices from diverse sources, "sense and respond" to changing conditions, "seed, select and amplify" a multitude of innovations and constantly "destabilize" themselves. Drawing on case studies of organizations including the Capital One credit card company and the Marine Corps, the authors apply these insights to basic business functions like inventory, pricing, product development and Web services. Their fluent, breathless style, replete with outrecute; theorizing, maintains a relentless tone of future-shock over developments that are mostly high-tech extensions of age-old business practices. While some of their farther-out prognostications-e.g., virtual-reality "experience machines"-may prove that nothing gets dated faster than futurism, there are enough pragmatic applications here for alert executives to chew on. 18 line drawings. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. ldquo;Holy cow! Integrating biology, management, nanotech, and evolutionmdash;if you loved James Gleickrsquo;s *Chaos*, yoursquo;ll love Itrsqus Alive.rdqo;mdash;SETH GODIN, author of *Survival is Not Enough*ldquo;Clearly captures the profound impact that biologically inspired technology and technology-infused biology will have on every aspect of our economy and society.rdqo; mdash;RAY KURZWEIL, inventor and author of *The Age of Spiritual Machines* ldquo;The book to read for anyone concerned about business innovation at a time when nothing seems to be going right.rdqo;mdash;Antonio Damasio, Van Allen Professor of Neurology, University of Iowa, and author of *Looking for Spinoza*ldquo;Read this exciting and sweeping book to regrind your own conceptual lenses for understanding business in the twenty-first centurymdash;the age of discontinuity.rdqo;mdash;JOHN SEELY BROWN, former director of Xerox PARCldquo;The Web is marrying the biological revolution and driving change in one industry after another. Chris Meyer and Stan Davis not only describe the coming revolution but provide a plan for prospecting in it.rdqo;mdash;Juan Enriquez, director of the Life Sciences Project, Harvard Business School, and author of *As the Future Catches You*ldquo;A CEO-level guide to the forces reshaping our economy. Meyer and Davis have created an essential tool kit for future growth.rdqo;mdash;Mick Yates, former group chairman, Johnson Johnson Consumer From the Hardcover edition. From the Inside Flap Why we are on the cusp of a new economic era that will make the changes and challenges of the Information Era seem like child?s play From the bestselling authors of *Blur*?a defining book of the Information Age?comes a startling glimpse into the near future and the emerging economy that awaits us. It?s *Alive* foretells the jolt the world is about to receive as the science of molecular evolution races out of the laboratories and into the business world. Think back to the early 1970s. 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