

A Poster For Lunch

The weather was closing in: the afternoon was damp and dark.

"Tell us a story, Gramps"

"OK children, sit down and be quiet"

This story is called,

"A poster for lunch"

Once upon a time (1990) I set off on a train, loaded with physicists en route to Wagga Wagga.

They were a happy group; poor but honest.

Not at all like the Engineers who met in luxury hotels, and were given presents by foreign manufacturers.

Off to their festival, the W square gathering, also known as "The Fourteenth Australian Institute of Physics, Condensed Matter Physics Meeting, Wagga Wagga February 1990"

Look, I'm not making it up; it's on the cover here.

The train was a lot slower than the Engineer's conference flight.

Finally we arrived at the Charles Sturt University, Riverina.

Buoyed by the knowledge that they had a faculty of wine-making.

A few days had passed and we were at lunch.

We were near some stands being set up for a poster session.

Oh dear, somebody didn't make it; there's an empty board.

We must fix that.

Let's write a poster paper instead of having lunch.

Have we texta pens; have we butcher's paper?

Well Gideon what shall we write about?

How about applying the principles of physics to management?

Have you noticed how when we moved labs it took much longer than predicted?

And they are always having trouble and arguments over space.

Our Overlord, from his stately office suite, issued a decree that if a section head didn't pay for his space, he might have a room cleared out and locked up.

His trendy business model for the labs.

Bit like on the old cruise ships.

There you are in your cabin, complete with en suite.

Steward comes in; looks at your ticket.

If it's second class he locks the toilet.

Then came the magic moment of Wagga.

Our first paragraph was writing itself.

"Period Doubling...Early observations"

Yes, as mathematical chaos approaches frequency reduces then halves.

Just as the time to move the labs was twice the predicted value.
And on to Feigenbaum and pitchfork bifurcations.

Then we moved onto spacial complexity.
We could help management find the infinite space of self similarity.
The Telecom split T becomes a Mandelbrot set.
There will always be space if you look hard enough.

Then onto the Lorenz condition and the instability often described as the "Butterfly Effect", first seen in a Lorenz system.
The differential equations implied by the RDI procedure certainly are sufficient to generate the mathematical chaos.
We drew the diagram of interactions.

And so the poster paper was ready to occupy the empty position.

Finally in large letters, the name and contributing authors.
A poster paper in 40 minutes.
Not that pretty, but solid and rivetting.

"ONSET OF CHAOS IN A MANAGEMENT ENVIRONMENT"

Time for the poster session.
We stood by the poster and defended its logic.
None could find a flaw.
Except it had not been processed by the papers committee back in Melbourne.

The final assembly of the conference.
Speeches and awards.
Oh no!
We are modestly overcome.
Our poster has won a prize; a bottle of premium wine made by the students under close supervision.
Awarded by one of the conference conveners from CSIRO.

But that is not the end of my story.
Several months pass, the wine long gone over a celebratory lunch.
A note drops into the in-tray.
One of the CSIRO scientists from the conference has just seen a review of a paper in a learned journal.
It has almost the same title as our poster.