

## **From Our Readers**

### *An Opinion . . .*

#### **"THE BUSINESS SYSTEMS PROFESSIONAL"**

In today's business environment a systems analyst needs to be much more than a computer specialist. The skills required to design and implement an effective system are not fully recognized by business nor by the analyst. Those analysts who are successful have learned their skills more by trial and error than by any other means. Unfortunately trial and error learning requires years of on-the-job-training. With today's demand for qualified analysts, industry cannot afford to rely on experience as the only teacher.

How can we move a Junior Analyst along faster? How do we recognize potential in a Junior Analyst? In the past we have emphasized technical training, but as in other professions, technical training is not sufficient. What other skills does a systems analyst need?

A lead analyst must be a highly skilled professional to develop effective systems in today's business environment. The analyst must understand and utilize project management skills, manage systems projects which span a one to five year time frame and involve analyst and programmer teams, as well as user teams. The analyst must be a good communicator, keeping all team members informed of objectives and progress, providing reports and presentations to management. Usually the analyst's ability to communicate with upper level management is critical to the acceptance and success of the systems project. Of equal importance is the analyst's understanding of organizational dynamics. This understanding includes not only an awareness of organizational politics and potential power plays among management, but also a sensitivity toward resistance to change expressed by clerical workers or other professionals. The analyst may have to resolve conflicts between individuals or departments before defining the initial project requirements. He may also have to be very skilled with people in order to isolate the real reasons for conflict or resistance. The analyst has to be able to present to management those organizational problems which will affect the project progress without stepping on toes, offending egos, or pointing fingers.

The analyst must also have a very thorough understanding of the organization's business functions. He must know why they are in business, how they conduct business, where their growth potential is, and where their bottlenecks are. He would be a fool to give a presentation to management without knowing how the system will affect business: the systems project will reduce operating cost, increase sales, provide management controls, or meet regulatory requirements. Hopefully the benefits outweigh the costs and the analyst has a reputation for completing projects within budget.

He must also understand computer technology. He must know what his resources are and how to use them. He has to be able to talk to the technical experts, aware that the snow which used to fall on the users is beginning to fall on the analysts. Therefore he has to keep current with technical advances, even as the gap widens between the technical computer specialists and the systems analyst. The analyst in fact becomes a user of their services. Buyer beware: he has to know what he is shopping for.

Finally, although this list is not intended to be all inclusive, a lead analyst must be a designer. He must have the ability to conceptualize and create. He must see the big picture as well as the detail. He must be able to pull all of his resources together to produce his end product: an operational system. A system which has stability, flexibility, growth potential, security, interfaces to other systems, meets user requirements, requires minimum resources from operations, is self protecting and fully automated, makes everyone happy and keeps the peace.

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Where do we find people of this caliber? Universities aren't producing them. Businesses very seldom recognize the requirements placed on analysts so they don't provide proper training and certainly not guidance. Analysts themselves don't recognize the skills they need until some bad experience suddenly makes them painfully aware of a shortcoming. If they don't possess all of these skills they should team up with someone who can provide what they lack.

These are exciting times for the professional systems analyst. The survivors have much to offer and much to gain. They see the organization as internal consultants and frankly have the need to learn as much as they can about the organization. They should be preparing themselves for the future by trying to learn as much as they can. Computers will have a great impact on organizations in the future. Good systems analysts who are in high demand now will be in greater demand tomorrow.

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