

## From Our Readers

To the Editor:

I nominate Borge Langefors' letter to the editor (December, 1977) as best "article" in the first year's issues of **MIS Quarterly**, even though his reference list was omitted. And I propose an extension to Langefors' three methods of analysis.

I suggest starting with success-factor analysis. Having identified success factors including negative-success — or failure — factors, the analysis may move on to Langefors' decision analysis; information analysis and data analysis follow. It is success factors that decision making should be concerned with. The word "should" is used deliberately; it adds normative flavor, whereas decision analysis, as Langefors describes it, could perhaps include easy decisions, fun decisions, and self-serving decisions as well as success-failure decisions. Langefors points out that by starting with decision analysis, "analysis gets simplified." This is even more true if one begins with success-factor analysis. (Perhaps William Zani in his article, "Blueprint for MIS," [*Harvard Business Review*, Vol. 48, No. 6, November-December, 1970, pp. 95-100], would agree since "key success variables" is at the center of his blueprint for MIS design [Exhibit 1, page 96].)

There is a multitude of relationships in information systems work that could be empirically examined and statistically analyzed. But first, as I think Langefors is saying, let us settle into some good theory and concepts and above all, be sure that research is not begun without attending to "the criterion problem." Maybe the criterion problem could be lessened by designing research to include the concept of success factor analysis.

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### *An Opinion . . .*

#### **"MANAGEMENT vs. the PROFESSIONALS — the OBJECTIVITY CRISIS"**

##### **Introduction**

In many organizations certain technical personnel such as systems analysts, management scientists, and operations researchers are hired to conduct studies on various topics. Large projects are frequently undertaken and men/months or men/years are spent to complete the studies. When the results are published, many executives often are surprised. They hoped to get a formula which would solve all their problems instantaneously, *i.e.*, without interrupting or changing the present organizational structure and/or operations. The results of the study, however, are not so simple. Management is disappointed, the proposal is shelved, and nothing is done about it. The nature of the problem remains. The only thing that has changed is that an expense has been incurred.

##### **The expert's point of view.**

Many studies are performed but only a small percentage of them produce results which are actually implemented. If a firm has had a problem for a number of years and it is determined to solve the issue, an expert may recommend the direction the firm should take. It is up to management whether to follow the recommendations or not. The road to success for almost all companies, people, and nations is long, hard, and very demanding. Sacrifices must be made and long hours worked. When finally an issue has been solved, the firm must keep on working and improving itself, otherwise the achieved success may turn to failure at a later date.

It must be recognized by all that there is no easy way to achieve one's goal. That is, in order to solve a problem, the organization must recognize that it has one, and then be willing to work hard to solve it. The expert cannot solve the problem by himself. There is no miracle formula, or magic out of a hat. Management must listen, open their minds, and be willing to accept recommendations. They must do their best to resolve the problem. No one by himself can make it happen. No matter how brilliant the expert may be, he only can propose.

#### **Who is to blame?**

Can we say that management is to blame for all the shortcomings? The answer is no. We are all humans and are influenced by our environment. If a company has operated for a number of years, certain procedures will become accepted. They are handed down from one associate to the next. If someone asks why a particular operation is being done a certain way, frequently one gets the answer: "We have been told to do so." Many times there is no relationship between the operation or function and day-to-day needs. There are many humorous stories existing about such cases.

Companies, corporations, and nations are run by humans which are creatures of habit. Therefore, these institutions have the same constraints as humans, *i.e.*, if certain operations are done long enough, they become habit. The balance between objectivity and subjectivity becomes distorted. Subjectivity becomes more important than objectivity. The very moment this happens, the organization or nation may start accepting things as they are. The operations become their personal functions, and there is the feeling that no change is needed.

#### **Why do original ideas change?**

It is interesting to see how many people, organizations, and nations originate with an idealized conception. Everyone is working hard and willing to sacrifice personally to achieve goals. But as the years go by, the day-to-day problems become overwhelming, and soon the purpose of the original organizational creation is forgotten. When this happens, people become discouraged. Organizations do not function as they should, or become too difficult to manage. Firms may change ownership or management. Unions become more business-oriented and forget about the social function they should fulfill. Nations change governments, and one administration blames the last one for all its shortcomings. No one seems to understand the other person, firm, or nation. When this happens nothing is accomplished, and frequently original ideas are ridiculed. People forget that over a period of time priorities do change, and so do people. New solutions to new problems must be found. But when everyone is overburdened with their daily tasks, when do they find time to think?

Management must be able to sit back and reason out what course of action to take. They cannot be overworked with daily routines. It takes a well disciplined manager who can handle such a task. How can one remain objective, when he has no time for self-analysis?

#### **The creditability gap.**

Some professions presently experience a creditability gap — systems analysts, management scientists, *etc.*, are examples of professions which depend very heavily on other people's cooperation. Years ago these professionals did most of their work on their desks. There was no interaction between those professionals and the people who were supposed to do the work. Most believed that the computer or model would solve all the problems which they are presumed to solved. We all have learned the hard way that this is untrue. None of these techniques solve all the problems. The computer or models are powerful tools for the decision-making process, but still humans must work in the system; humans must keep it working.

Some time ago management started to mistrust the experts and still does because the end results of many projects are complete failures. How can an expert really understand the system or model if he is not capable of understanding or comprehending the warehouse man, accounting clerk, *etc.*? The expert must be able and capable of communicating with all associates within the organization. If he cannot, he will lack some of the capability of completing studies.

### **How can one stay objective?**

The question will be raised, how can one stay objective and continue to contribute to the overall benefit of an organization? I believe in order to become a professional, one has to move around, especially in the professions in which one deals with people. An individual must be exposed to different environments of various organizations in order to understand and deal with humans.

Almost all organizations work similarly, but the degree of approaching given tasks varies from place to place. How can one become objective if he is only exposed to one environment? One should call himself a professional only when he has at least five years practical experience and has been with three different companies, preferably a small, medium, and large size one, and within three different industries.

In order to remain objective, one should join professional groups and interact, exchange thoughts, and be willing to listen and experiment with new ideas. Man sets his own limitations, *i.e.*, companies, corporations, and nations, set their own limits.

Another way which would benefit the organization as well as the professionals would be to send the professionals every five years for one term to a university. Here they could interact with others and also encounter recent theories and how to use them in practice. The interaction between the professionals and the academicians would benefit both groups. The professionals could use all of their abilities in searching for improvements of their professional knowledge, which in turn would benefit the organization. The academicians would get an awareness of the problems which the professionals face daily.

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