

Feedback: A Synopsis of Readers' Responses

Why not say it clearly?

The Guidelines for the preparation of documentation issued by the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations read as follows:

“There are few, if any, useful ideas that cannot be expressed in clear language. Obscurity rarely, if ever, denotes superior scholarship. It usually signifies either inability to write clearly or – and more commonly – muddled or incomplete thought.”

After having read the last four issues of HSM I have come to the conclusion that the Policy Coordinator and the team of editors should hasten to make the above guidelines or something similar the rule of the MHS/HMS game.

Frans J. SOEDE
UNIDO

Productivity issue will not go away

David H. Weinflash's Editorial (this issue) on do-it-yourself productivity, addresses timely issue which will affect business strategies for decades to come. By taking the example of word processing machinery and intelligent electronics in general, he focuses on the productivity of services and thus of management itself.

The manufacturers and vendors of word processing equipment have made one strategically significant error: the purpose of intelligent electronics is *not* increasing the productivity of secretaries and supporting staff, but the productivity of managers and executives. By targeting the equipment, in terms of its design and function, to traditional secretarial groups, they have further removed it from its intended beneficiaries and ultimate users. Word processing electronics should be designed and marketed for direct use by managers, not for expanding and further separating the functions of supporting personnel. Some companies are finally getting the message and are starting to cater directly to managers.

Consider the following analogy. When a transition was made from horse carriage to automobile, the old habit of maintaining 'support personnel' led to the replacement of coachmen by chauffeurs. First automobiles were so designed that their user either would not or could not 'be caught' behind the wheel. They were designed for chauffeurs rather than for their actual users. Yet, it was soon recognized that the actual advantage and wider dissemination of automobiles was dependent on user's ability to do it himself. Word processing technology is in a similar stage of transition.

The do-it-yourself philosophy is continuing to strengthen its dominating impact. Automobiles are being designed not only for self-driving, but also for self-servicing and self-maintenance. Self-diagnosing, module-based engines are designed for a simple 'do-it-yourself' maintenance by the user. There are service-free batteries, puncture-proof tires, self-adjusting brakes, self-service gas stations, and so on. Do-it-yourself garages, tool 'libraries', self-repair guides, books, and video-discs – these are just a few of the accompanying phenomena.

Similar trends are occurring in word processing. Users of IBM's Displaywriter not only have to install

their own machine but also have to teach themselves how to use it. If the unit malfunctions, the IBM customer has to tell a repairman what is wrong with it, using diagnostic equipment built into the machine.

This 'do-it-yourself' service and support strategy is the wave of the future.

Milan ZELENY