Feedback: A Synopsis of Readers’ Responses

Why not say it clearly?

The Guidelines for the preparation of documenta-
tion issued by the Economic and Social Council of
the United Nations read as follows:
“...few, if any, useful ideas that cannot be
expressed in clear language. Obscurity rarely, if
ever, denotes superior scholarship. It usually sig-
nifies 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 Coordi-
nator and the team of editors should hasten to make
the above guidelines or something similar the rule of
the MHS/HMS game.

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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 support-
ing staff, but the productivity of managers and execu-
tives. By targeting the equipment, in terms of its
design and function, to traditional secretarial groups,
they have further removed it from its intended bene-
factors and ultimate users. Word processing elec-
tronics 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 auto-
mobiles 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 automo-
biles 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.

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