

# MANAGING

# DATA PROCESSING

COMPILED BY  
EDWARD O. JOSLIN  
RICHARD A. BASSLER





3 0112 006329533

ISBN 0-916580-00-8



Charles N. Ritley

## FOR SUCCESSFUL SYSTEMS, DEBUG THE PEOPLE PROBLEM

AS EXECUTIVES are discovering that turnkey computer systems can solve their paperwork problems, they're also finding out that a brand new computer can bring with it a new set of problems—people problems—that could diminish the advantages they paid for. Professional systems analysts are aware of people problems that arise with new systems and plan for them. The executive installing his first system will profit by knowing the potential problems and preparing to cope with them. His reward will be a smooth-running system, and good customer and employee relations. Plus, he'll get all computer power he paid for.

### Why people?

A system is simply a means of receiving information from one group of people and preparing it for use by another group. No matter how sophisticated the hardware becomes, or how many jobs it eliminates, a computer system still requires people to create, process, and use the information. Fear of the unknown is one universal human problem that can't be solved electronically. Your new computer will change job structures; it will take over routine work now being done by people. Your staff is going to wonder how their jobs will

change, and wondering and worrying will make them less efficient.

### How to educate

Once you decide to buy a computer, start the education process immediately. Let your staff know of your decision and sell them on the advantages. Borrow an idea from the professional analysts: hold an informal meeting to give your staff a chance to ask questions and you a chance to clear up any doubts they might have. Start off positively. Don't say "rising costs are forcing me to automate and it's either that or close the doors". Don't say it even if it's true. A positive approach avoids getting everyone worried about their job security and losing the pioneering spirit you'll need to get the system installed. Sell the fact that orders will be processed faster, or customer service will be better, or that inventory will at last be accurate. Make the point that much of the paper shuffling will be reduced. Sell employees on how a new system will make their job easier, and be specific. Tell Mary Ellen that she won't have to spend two hours every morning matching file copies and you automatically have one ally.

By handling these early stages right, you create a spirit of excitement that can overrule the fear of the unknown.

Fear breeds inefficiency, which defeats the purpose of having a computer.

### Personnel requirements plan

During the early stages, even you, as the manager, may not be exactly sure how the job structure will change. As the system begins to take shape on the drawing board, you'll begin to see which staff members will be affected. Some jobs will be unaffected; some jobs that are overloaded now will simply drop down to a normal workload. And new jobs may be created while others disappear. Begin working out a plan that will show everyone's job responsibilities and bring each individual into the picture as his new job becomes clear.

Keep morale high by stressing the positive changes. The computer will be making extra manhours available to you, and this is a good time to start reassigning people to those projects you've been waiting to tackle. Sell them on the opportunity to tackle these new challenges. As each employee sees the exact nature of his or her new job, the element of fear will be gone.

### The non-adaptors

A computer's ability to gobble up paperwork has a repercussion on

Reprinted from the September, 1974 issue of *Modern Office Procedures* and copyrighted 1974 by Industrial Publishing Company, Division Pittway Corporation.



people's jobs. Although a new system can free a person for more creative work, it cannot give the person more creativity than he or she already has. There will always be a certain percentage of employees doing tedious rote work who can't or don't want to do anything else. When automation changes the work they're doing now, you will have to make the decision of what to do with their free time. Such factors as seniority, union rules, and age compound the problem. The questions of what to do about retaining, adapting, or transferring can only be answered by your own management skills and company policies.

### Divided responsibility

When a system is automated, responsibility for performing a job may become fragmented. In a small office, responsibility is very easy to pinpoint. One person, for example, may have sole responsibility for the entire order system. She will type up all orders, maintain the files of open and back orders, type up shipping papers, and prepare bills. In short, she is entirely responsible for all order paperwork; if anything goes amiss, she knows exactly where to look. In an automated order entry system, however, inside sales may enter an order, the production department may alter the order, and the inventory control group will input data when the shipment leaves the loading dock. Each area is handling such a small piece of the data requirements that no one area feels a sense of responsibility. A good system, of course, will provide accountability in that you can tell where errors came from and who made them. But there is a vast difference in work when it is done right because the system requires it as opposed to work done right because the worker takes pride in it. It's your job to install this pride by explaining to the worker how much of the system's accuracy and efficiency de-

pends on his performing his part of it. A system brings a number of diverse elements together as a team—perhaps for the first time. Managing this new team, however small, will be a challenge to your executive ability.

### Pride of workmanship

Problems of dehumanization of workers on assembly lines and the resultant labor difficulties are well known. Large corporations have no patent on this kind of problem; it can happen in your own office on a smaller scale. Suppose you have a girl named Susan who has been handling all accounts receivable for the last 10 years. She does the whole thing: statements, collections, bookkeeping. After your new computer has been doing the inventory so well for six months, you decide to buy an A/R package which will give you some reports that you need and cut Susan's work load in half. Now, instead of handling all the details manually, her work will center on preparing input for the computer. This can be a severe strain on some people. Work that they have taken a great deal of pride in is being taken from them. They may become disgruntled. When that occurs, they'll make more errors—perhaps do everything possible to fight and even sabotage the system and prove that they could do a better job manually.

The solution lies in explaining to Susan that the logic of what is being done automatically is the same as in the manual system. When she enters a debit or credit, it will have the same effect as it would with the old manual bookkeeping system; the difference is that the ledger entries are made electronically and she can't see them. Next, her responsibilities have not really changed. Although the machinery is handling much of her paperwork, emphasize that she is still running the system. It's her responsibility to see that the right entries are made for the right customers,

and that management receives the right information. She can still have pride of workmanship because the computer will produce accurate results only if she supplies it with accurate input.

### Presenting a united front

A few bugs creep into any new system. When they do, it's important that employees stand together to fix the problem and start over. When errors involve customers, keep up a united front. An employee's first tendency will be to get himself off the hook: "I'm sorry, Mr. Smith, I took the order information down correctly, but that new computer must have messed it up". This only convinces Smith that the good service he has been accustomed to is about to give way to bad service. A much better approach: "We're sorry about the error, Mr. Smith, and we've corrected it already. We have a brand-new computerized system and—like anything new—we've had a few minor start-up problems. But the important thing is that, with this new system, we'll be able to save a full day from delivery time". By following this line you've explained the situation to Smith, who has probably had new systems problems of his own. And you've told him that the new system has a big plus for him—earlier deliveries.

### More about customers

Customers are people, too. If the new system will in any way affect the customer, do some advance work. If bills, statements, order forms, or shipping documents will be altered, let the customer know in advance. This is especially important if procedures will change, too. A brief form letter will do it, or an explanatory note along the first new statement. And do a little selling at the same time. Any efficiencies in your own operation that will result in better service for your customers is worth talking about.