

DISCUSSION

Authors: Martini-Vvdensky

Arthur Fairfull: I should like to emphasise my concurrence with the opinions you have expressed. Matsel systems are also taking this approach to companies, but it is not easy. Are you aware of any practical experience?

Jane Martini-Vvdensky, author's response: There is to my knowledge very little experience to date. We have provided shells for two major corporations in the UK, but they have not amassed sufficient data to judge the results.

Walter Grattidge: Your paper is built on two assumptions:

- o information is a public good for a company
- o each piece of information is of equal weight.

Should not the role of management be to filter and weight the individual reports to emphasize the experience and deemphasize unusual instances for which there have been special circumstances?

Jane Martini-Vvdensky, author's response: A corporation will ideally keep information that will affect its operations and discard what is unimportant. However, it is not possible to know which information will become important in the future. It would be helpful, therefore to retain all the experience information but recall only relevant reports when subsequent designs are considered. Even this is difficult because of the intelligence needed to decide whether a piece of information is relevant (part of the additional sophistication I referred to in the paper). Some companies will argue that they wish to shelter their front-line engineers from receiving too much information, precisely because these engineers may lack the perspective to decide about the relevance of previous experience. Our opinion is that this information is education and therefore builds perspective. This, however, is a matter of corporate philosophy which will vary from one company to another.

Philip Sargent: It seemed to me that you were being unnecessarily restrictive in your view that a form-based, record-oriented data entry technique was appropriate. Have you considered the use of free text databases such as Harwell's "Stratus" or the "Ask Sam" package used for the "Invergate" hearings.

Jane Martini-Vvdensky, author's response: The problem with free text is that each person has a different idea about what is important about a given situation. The reason we propose a form-based system is that it provides a vehicle for posing specific questions - thereby encouraging a more complete description. As experience in gathering reports is obtained, the system manager can refine the questions on the forms to ensure that reports cover all important aspects. It is even possible to create intelligent forms which ask different questions depending on the answers given. We already expect one or more free text fields that would allow the contributor to describe the situation in his own words.