



Information Systems Management: The M*A*C*R*O Approach

by Charles T. Smith
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To say that IS management has undergone many changes in recent years would be a tremendous understatement. The client/ server revolution has forced enormous changes upon most organizations, requiring radically different approaches to system analysis, design, development and operation. The technological differences between new architectures and traditional legacy systems also have presented managers with substantial challenges, both in helping their staffs adapt to the methods and in learning the new disciplines themselves.

The power and complexity of these new technologies often divert attention from the human side of IS management. The best software and hardware in the world can't help an organization whose users feel threatened by it. In fact, a technically elegant system implementation can actually create an organizational crisis if the confidence and support of the users is not secured and maintained. Further complicating the situation is the fact that every organization harbors a hidden world of political undercurrents, unofficial lines of authority and conflicting personal agendas. What's more, a substantial number of IS managers coming up from the ranks of programmers and analysts are hindered by both a technology-centered mindset and a dearth of management skills to help them cope with these dilemmas.

Charles T. Smith has been grappling with this dilemma for over 30 years. He began as a programmer, then was an analyst and has occupied several IS management positions since 1971. Since 1987, he has led a consulting group that helps user

companies manage existing IS resources, reengineer and implement new technologies.

The Meaning of MACRO

Exploring and demystifying the political side of IS management is the goal of Smith's book, *Information Systems Management: The M*A*C*R*O Approach*. In this context, *MACRO* does not refer to the shortcut accessory featured in many desktop applications. Smith uses the letters as a mnemonic acronym to represent his methods of successful IS oversight. The five elements are these:

- Modify your behavior
- Accept the politics
- Comfort your customer
- Relate the technology to the business
- Offer technical leadership.

In his introduction, Smith compares notions of what IS management is supposed to be with the reality of what it is. He points out that formal job descriptions and periodic reviews exist only to satisfy organizational requirements, and that both of these are determined primarily by the quality of the relationship between an IS manager and his or her boss. The introduction also includes "five reasons why IS managers fail": behaving like an analyst or programmer; not building career-critical relationships; mishandling customers; not communicating in business terms; and not providing technical leadership.

Smith devotes a chapter to each of the five MACRO elements listed above. Each of these chapters starts out with an explanation of why and how technical people

fall short in different IS management tasks: "Why IS professionals have difficulty dealing with customers," "Why IS jargon is difficult to translate into business terms" and so on. In each case, the analysis is followed by a series of tips that prescribe remedies to these problems. Featured at various points are scenarios that illustrate crises of IS management, many of which are drawn from Smith's real-life experiences. Each MACRO chapter includes a summary of the critical points. Smith advises keeping a daily journal and closes each chapter with suggested journal exercises.

A later chapter includes a case study that illustrates the practice of MACRO principles, and another is devoted to real-life scenarios. In conclusion, Smith reminds us that work should be about doing what we love to do and that we should take some time to reflect on the sense of joy and reward we get from our accomplishments. A suggested reading list tops off the book.

In addition to its spacious and comprehensive format, this book has two more outstanding qualities. One is its easygoing delivery; Smith offers insights as if he's chatting around the coffee pot at the office. The other attribute is humor; there are at least a couple of laughs on every page, usually in the context of an anecdote or a hypothetical situation with which IS professionals can empathize. These aspects make the book not only easy to learn from, but downright enjoyable and suitable for leisure reading.

What's missing from this book is only what Smith never intended to provide; IS professionals who want a guide to new technologies or methodologies should look elsewhere. This book is about how IS professionals climbing the management ladder can better understand and deal with the people they encounter. As such, it is an important contribution. Many textbooks that attempt to accomplish the same goal lack the effectiveness of Smith's colloquial approach. **IT**

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By Jim Johnson