The User Interface

Establishing User Interfaces

The success factors in analysis start with the established interfaces from day one. What does this mean? You must start the process by meeting with the right people in the organization. In the best projects, the process is as follows:

1. **Executive interface**: There needs to be an executive-level supporter of the project. Without such a supporter, you risk not being able to keep the project on schedule. Most important, you need a supporter for the political issues that you may need to handle during the project (discussed in detail later). The executive supporter, sometimes known as a sponsor (JAD reference), should provide a preliminary schedule advising the organization of what is expected and the objectives of the project. The executive supporter should attach a letter to the preliminary schedule and send it to the project team members. The letter must put the importance of the project into perspective. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that you draft this letter yourself or at least have influence over its content, since doing so can ensure that the message is delivered appropriately. The executive supporter should also establish regular reviews with the analyst and the user community to ensure that objectives are being met.

2. **Department head or line manager interface**: If appropriate, the department head should provide guidance about which individuals should represent the department needs. If several people are involved, the analyst should consider a JAD-like approach. Depending on the size of the organization, the department head might also establish review sessions to ensure compliance.

3. **Functional user interface**: Perhaps the most important people are the ones who can provide the step-by-step needs of the system. Figure 3.1 shows a typical organization interface structure.

Forming an Interview Approach

Your primary mission as an analyst or systems designer is to extract the physical requirements of the users and convert each to its logical equivalent (see Chapter 4 for a full discussion of the concept of the logical equivalent). The most critical
step in this mission is the actual interview, in which you must establish a rapport with the user(s) that will facilitate your obtaining the information you need. Your approach will dramatically change based on the level and category of the individual being interviewed. Therefore, prior to meeting with any user, it is critical to understand the culture of the company, its past experiences with automation, and most important its organizational structure.

The following five-step procedure will help guide you more smoothly through the interview process.

Step 1: Get The Organization Chart

Few things are more useful in understanding the chain of command and areas of responsibility than the organization chart. Depending on the size of the enterprise and the scope of the project, the organization chart should start at the executive supporter level and work down to the operational users.

Step 2: Understand Everyone’s Role in the Organization Chart

If there are any individuals not involved in the project who should be, given their position in the organization, first ask why and then make a notation for yourself that they are not to be included. Management may assume an individual or role should not be included and may often overlook their importance. Do not be afraid to ask why a person is not deemed necessary for the analysis of the system, and determine if you are satisfied with the reasons for their exclusion. Remember, you can still control and change the approach at this point, and management will probably respect you for doing so.

Step 3: Assume the Situation Is Political

Be sure you understand the personalities with which you will have to deal. In almost any implementation, politics among people becomes part of the process. To ignore its existence—and the constraints it is likely to impose—is to invite