SOFTWARE MANAGER

How to get people and technology to work together.

MANAGER EXCHANGE

Q: How do you get managers to buy into the new software techniques that the new college graduates have been taught, like abstract data types, object-oriented design, and design first/code later?

A: *Response by Dianne Fecteau, a consultant based in Washington, D.C.*

Managers are more likely to buy into new software techniques when they can see how the practical application of the techniques will meet their needs. When the emphasis is on applying technology rather than meeting needs, managers resist new techniques. The graduates who champion a technology do little to overcome this resistance when they try to sell it solely on technical merits or as a solution to a poorly defined problem.

To successfully introduce new technology, the following guidelines may be helpful:

First, consider the problems confronting the systems-development organization. Your perceptions as a relative newcomer must be augmented by a careful analysis of problems identified in meetings, memos, and complaints. Make a list from which you will select a small problem that the new technology could address. Prepare a one-page action plan.

Second, find an audience for your ideas. That audience may be your boss or a well-respected staff person. An idea has more force if there are several sources for its support. Be willing to share the glory for the new idea.

Finally, don't be strident in championing the idea. Rather, let yourself be seen as someone who tries to find solutions to problems.

And what if the organization fails to adopt new technology and continues to experience systems-development problems that could be avoided? Organizations vary in receptivity to new ideas, and it may be that the organization's speed in adopting new technology is not sufficient to meet your timetable.

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