3) What is the role of the fast developing professional management associations in the context of corporate image in India today ?

4) In what ways can there be an effective transfer of management technology to the corporate sector as a whole ?

This book may offer some guidelines in the search for answers to these questions.

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Management Planning and Information System. by S. K. Bhattacharyya. New Delhi, Learning Systems, 1976. Rs. 40/-

In style and content Prof. Bhattacharyya's book is perhaps the first of its kind in India. Part I has eleven sections in a total of twentythree pages. These pages cover the conceptual and schematic aspects of a planning and information system (for the author information and control system are synonymous — p.1). Part II has six sections covering twelve pages. The step-by-step process of creating and launching an MPIS is described in this portion of the book. There are a few supplements in the end which show information formats for engineering projects, textile and foundry business.

The book has no pretensions to be considered as a scholarly work. It is one of an 'executive self-development' series. That explains most of the features associated with the book (e.g. quality paper and print, affluent use of paper, pages for notes being graph paper, etc.). The imprint of the author's varied experience of industry — mainly as a consultant — is obvious.

Let us take a somewhat closer look at some of the finer points.

1) As mentioned, above, the author has considered information and control systems as identical. Indian managers (or for that matter managers elsewhere) perhaps need to grasp that information is only a means towards control. Control is a process, whereas information is the throughput in that process. The control process has wider and deeper managerial — especially qualitative — implications than implied by information alone. Control should ideally concern itself with the art of handling information. Of course, information generation is a pre-requisite.

2) When the author suggests that three distinct levels of management (corporate, executive, and operating - p.9.) are found in an organisation, he seems to have in mind the typical large firm in the private and public sectors. True, the need for organised MPIS is positively correlated to the firm size. Yet, there is a vast

number of firms where we find it hard to make such distinctions — even if the boundaries are somewhat flexible. There could be an alternative to this apriori categorisation. Information and planning needs are derived from a role or a role-set. If the major result areas to be looked after are identified for a given future period for this role or for various roles in the role-set, then the information need would emerge as a derivative of this package of result areas. One may not then go by deductive notions of what kind of information should or should not go to which manager — the deciding criterion being the class or group to which he belongs. Instead tailoring on-gotng information needs, as well as the long-term ones, would then proceed inductively, based on what key result areas a manager, or a group of managers, have to accomplish. The author does suggest the idea of 'critical variables in operations' (p.18). This seems to be of a similar breed as major or key result areas. The vital difference, however, is that whereas the latter are derivatives of specific roles or role-sets, the former are objective data relating to the organisation as a unit — or a part of it. In any MPIS the link between the role and the organisational sub-units should be explicit, and in an ongoing system, the analysis should perhaps begin with the role, and not the operation, For an operation's aggregative index may be a shared responsibility of several roles. Each may need different, though complementary, information flows. If this is not perceived and worked through, then providing for merely the aggregative performance index of a given operation may not end up in its being successfully accomplished.

3) This brings us to the concept of 'responsibility centres' (p. 16). Although the author has used R. N. Anthony's model of three-fold classification of management planning and control activities (p. 11), for some inexplicable reason he omits to tell the manager about the extremely useful classification of responsibility centres into 'cost', 'profit', and 'investment' ones. In fact, it could have been meaningfully linked up with 'operating', 'executive' and 'corporate' levels of management, as well as to performance 'programme' and 'strategic' planning activities. Identification of key result areas is, however, a more detailed extension of the responsibility centre concept in the context of several members who would be collaboratively managing one or more responsibility centres.

4) While writing about the process of planning, the author mentions about 'policy guidelines' (p. 13). But it seems to be assumed that managers are able to draw operational distinctions between objectives and policies, intentions and policies, assumptions and policies, and the like. Our experience indicates otherwise. When managers are asked to spell out their respective single or group objectives, policies and assumptions, we have invariably seen how all of them get mixed up. It needs some sustained practice to internalise the distinctions between these contituents of planning. It should have been useful to throw light on this practical issue.

Later in the same page the author describes the process of finalising various kinds of budgets, based on overall organisational goals and targets. It is obvious that the author is writing against the framework of single-point estimates. In our opinion. it could have been a useful amplification for managers if it were suggested that there is a concept of 'continency plans', and that this could be given practical shape by constructing budgets at say, three levels, instead of one. Thus, budgets could be geared to the 'optimistic', 'average' and 'pessimistic' levels of assumptions. This, in turn, would require managers to list explicitly the various key assumptions, and their respective values on the 3-point scale. In the absence of such an effort, a single-point budget figure in usually an unidentifiable mixture of inconsistent and unmatched values of various assumptions.

5) On page 20 it is suggested that "It is important to ensure that only those costs which are controllable by the managers receiving the report, and revenues generated by his operations, are included in the report". This is at best a partially sound guideline. If the value of information lies also in the enlargement of the recipient's circle of awareness, then apportioned or allocated costs of the broader system as well as of other common support sub-systems should also be included in the reports. No one suggest that the recipient should be answerable for these costs. But why should he not see himself in the total context ?

6) When the author reaches the second part of his book, he outlines several sequential steps to design and implement an MPIS. One looks in vain for a specific reference anywhere as to who would be undertaking the execution of these steps. Although 'insiders' are mentioned on p. 25, he does not say who these insiders are to be. Would they be accountants, systems analysts, corporate planners, or any combination of them ? What would be their organisational status and linkages ? In our view, an organisational decision for carrying out the MPIS activity is a crucial one. Managers might have benefitted from the author's insight in this area. It may only be indirectly inferred, from what is written about financial accounting vs. MPIS in the same page, that not much involvement of conventional accounting staff is called for. But there is nothing more positive in the respect.

7) For both the 'managerial' and 'technical' segments of systems design, interviews with managers are suggested (p. 27 and p. 29). These interviews are supposed to elicit from managers their information needs. In our limited experience we have found that at least for the managerial stream, and even at times for the technical stream, line managers are either unable to articulate what they need, or they simply deny that they have any obligation to think through what information they need. Such abdication is a quite common phenomenon. It is said that a cost accountant, for example, is paid to supply information which would be useful to line managers. Why should they then be bothered with questions about what information is

required by them? Anybody who attempts to use the interview method for discovering information needs should be aware of this real impediment, and ought to think of ways for working through it. Line managers should also ponder over this point.

There are a few minor slips which, with a little more thoroughness in proof-reading, could have been avoided e.g., grammatical errors like 'with a view to debug' (p. 32), 'the management values......is basically the most crucial factor' (p. 36), omission of sources from where quotations have been given (e.g. p. 5, p. 6).

On the whole, an Indian manager in large organisations can look forward to an analytical method of probing into MPIS in this well-produced, maxi-sized mini-book.

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