The Expert's Opinion

Paul Taylor is vice president of information services at International Multifoods. In this position he has corporate-wide responsibility for information processing, voice and data communications and other related activities. He has been with Multifoods since 1962, holding a variety of management positions.

Interview by Karen Cullings

IRMJ: You have some recent exposure to business systems planning that has led you to some conclusions about the importance of executive sponsorship of a project. Can you share that with us?

TAYLOR: IBM has a methodology which they used internally and then introduced to the marketplace in 1975, its acronym is BSP or Business Systems Planning. As a result of customer input they have updated it and a new version was released in 1987; they have expanded the acronym from three to five letters, and now it's BSP/SA or Business Systems Planning for Strategic Alignment. We did a BSP/SA at Multifoods last spring and into summer. Recently IBM has started a BSP Forum program at its Education Center near New York City. This program brings together people who have participated in these types of projects. I presented at the BSP Forum in February 1991. The title of my presentation was “Executive Sponsorship: The Ultimate Critical Success Factor.” So, I think that executive sponsorship certainly is very relevant to us right now.

IRMJ: I take it that you think what is really critical is the achievement of an alignment between a company’s overall objectives and strategies and those of the IT department?

TAYLOR: That’s absolutely right. But there’s more to it. Maybe I can make it clearest by giving you some personal background. I graduated from the University of Minnesota in December of 1961 with a B.A. in Economics and a minor in Mathematics. I went to work for International Milling Company the next month, January 1962. We changed our name from International Milling to International Multifoods in 1970, so it has been my only employer. My background is sales, marketing and general management. We rather significantly reorganized our U.S. operations beginning in the spring of 1985 and one of the most dramatic parts of the reorganization was the operating division for which I was responsible disappeared from the organization chart. So, the Chairman of the Board asked me to assume the newly created position of Vice President of Information Services, feeling that a person with stature within the organization, experience within the businesses and a non-technical background was the kind of person he wanted to have in the top position to help the company begin to make better use of computer technology. I have been doing this now for about six years, and I would have to say it is quite a different experience from that which I had for the first 23 years of my career. It has been interesting and at the same time frustrating in that it is a business discipline that is not well understood by senior management. Our company has experienced a great deal of change in the last six or seven years, primarily in the U. S. So we’ve been operating in a dynamic and at times disruptive environment with a great deal to do—and doing it well with respect to the traditional disciplines: sales, marketing, manufacturing, distribution, credit, finance, etc. Most
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