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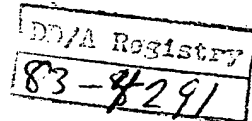
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ADMINISTRATIVE — INTERNAL USE ON●

6 September 1983

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Interview with James H. McDonald
                     Associate Deputy Director for Administration

I met with Jim McDonald, Associate Deputy Director for Administration, on 1 September to discuss his views on Executive Support Systems. The interview centered around the attached list of questions, which were developed as a basis for discussion. During the interview Mr. McDonald provided some insights into the problems that he faces as a senior manager and into the types of information he needs in making his decisions or decision recommendations. He specifically identified the need for an electronic mail system and for a system to keep track of component tasking and DDA front office appointments. Since this interview was conducted without advance notice, Mr. McDonald's comments should be considered as preliminary--his initial reaction to the problem. A follow-up meeting or question session probably will be needed to flesh out this summary of his views.

Mr. McDonald identified a number of problems that impacted heavily on his time as a senior Directorate officer. These were the number of meetings that he was required to attend or chair and the volume of written material that he needed to read or prepare. He cited staff meetings, ad hoc sessions on Directorate programs, and meetings in connection with his role as head of the MG Career Service and as Chairman of the Senior Personnel Resources Board as large consumers of his time. Preparations for these meetings requires detailed review of material, including personnel files, to make determinations concerning assignments and training. As A/DDA, he also reads all the material that goes to the DDA and provides recommendations to Mr. Fitzwater on various decisions that must be made on the full range of Directorate activities.

Mr. McDonald noted several areas where additional or more timely information would be helpful in his decision making role, specifically dealing with personnel management and budget projections. Information on personnel is needed for managing the MG career service, chairing the Senior Personnel Resources Board, and for anticipating Directorate strength levels at the end of the fiscal year. The information on the Directorate budget is especially critical to him in September, when the DDA is attempting to ensure that adequate money is available to fund various obligations and that it does not exceed its authorized budget. He indicated an occasional need for information on space allocations and requirements, but this was not critical to his work.

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Most of the information used by Mr. McDonald in his decision making comes in either oral or written form. Oral communications--either meetings, telephone calls, or face-to-face sessions--provide him with the bulk of his information, more so than the written word. The level of detail that he requires for any decision varies with the problem being addressed. He doubted that any one information system provided the data needed on the many areas for which the Directorate has responsibility. In some instances, especially at the end of a fiscal year, very specific information is needed about office budgets and expenditures. For the rest of the year, more general information would be adequate. Similarly in the personnel arena, specific information is needed on MG officers a few times each month and on overall Directorate personnel levels during the last month or two of the fiscal year. In most other instances, summary data would be sufficient to meet his needs. In general, he felt that detailed information on most DDA activities should be used in the offices charged with administering programs.

Mr. McDonald named some specific areas where he felt an executive support system could facilitate his work: electronic mail, document transmission, and scheduling. He thought AIM or some other form of electronic mail could facilitate the transmission of information between the DDA front office and component heads. The need to prepare formal memos using cover sheets to get office views on specific issues was, from his perspective, inefficient and time-consuming. His office needs a vehicle to get information to office directors expeditiously and to receive their comments without a lapse of several days. Likewise, he would like to be able to transmit material quickly to offices rather than have to send documents through the mail system. Mr. McDonald felt that WANG or some other system would assist the DDA front office in keeping track of taskings levied on DDA offices and in scheduling meetings and speaking engagements for the DDA and himself. He thought that some existing systems, such as PERSIGN and SAFE, might have utility in new executive support systems.

Finally, Mr. McDonald was uncertain if he would be willing to sit at a terminal to receive information from an Executive Support System or to manipulate data. He has had no experience in using terminals, but indicated that he would be willing to learn if the system did not require lengthy training. His comments suggested that any computer or word processing system installed in his office would have to be user friendly for him to feel comfortable using. He had an open mind about the introduction of information management systems that could ease his work, but would probably need to be convinced of their utility and ease of use.

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Member, Executive Systems
Working Group

Attachment