THE IDI APPROACH TO STANDARDS AND METHODOLOGY

A framework of consistent policies, procedures, methods, standards, conventions, guidelines, and techniques is essential to a manageable and effective information systems organization of any size. Consequently, much of our consulting activity focuses on helping our clients:

- choose, develop, and integrate appropriate, *standards*, *methodologies* and supporting *tools*, and
- establish organization structures[1] for the on-going development, review and approval, dissemination, and administration of these methodologies.

Experience confirms that standards and creativity fit well together. A well-conceived methodology can be presented to the professional staff not as a burdensome list of rules and restrictions but rather as a supporting structure to make their jobs easier and more interesting.

Despite our vigorous advocacy of standards, we firmly resist any temptation to standardize everything that can possibly be standardized. A vigorous and effective methodology ought to allow and encourage original problem solutions and reasonable individual variations in style. Any proposed standard must be justified by its expected contribution, immediate or long-range, to the performance of the organization.

Although a quick means of reviewing requests for approval of deviations should be a part of any methodology program, IDI prefers to build flexibility into the standards themselves rather than into their enforcement. A flexible standard observed all of the time is much more valuable and much more manageable than a rigid standard observed some of the time.

IDI strongly emphasizes the need for unwavering management support and discipline in applying a methodology. The practical value of standards is usually greatest in just those high-pressure situations that most tempt us to set them aside.

Decentralization[2] of both computing power and professional staffs is making these principles more important than ever. It's impossible, administratively and politically, to impose dozens of arbitrary rigid rules upon dispersed and uncomprehending professional staffs. It can be suicidal for a central service organization to burden itself with excessive formality and red tape while its users are free to adopt seemingly simpler and more responsive alternatives. The benefits of any methodology must be not only real but also apparent to the people who will be held accountable for results.

C++, Java, Visual Basic:
An urgent need for in-house standards

Two decades ago most organizations had a set of written standards for Cobol or Fortran programming. Today's modern development tools and environments offer many times more choices to programmers, and the impact of those choices is many times broader. Before assigning a team of recently trained professionals to their first object-oriented or event-driven software project, an organization should lay a solid foundation of preferred or required techniques.

Recent additions to these tools, such as C++ exception handling and the Standard Template Library, as well as the use of third-party component libraries, make the world of software development more and more complex and the need for enlightened standards more and more critical.

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1 Including such functions as quality assurance, internal consulting, training, and data administration.

2 See Conrad Weisert's paper "Methodology Development and Administration with Decentralized System Development", Proceedings of COPE'IT 93, Danish Data Association, June, 1993.