

## VII. Information Acquisition

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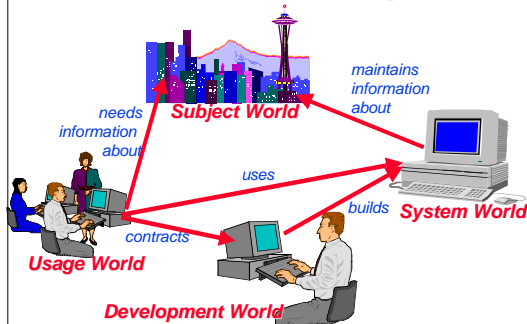
## Information Acquisition

- "Information acquisition" refers to the task of capturing all sorts of relevant information about how things are currently done, including:
  - ✓ Information flow
  - ✓ Business processes
  - ✓ Data that is used in these processes
  - ✓ External and internal data
  - ✓ Exception handling
  - ✓ Problems with current situation, including existing systems
  - ✓ Desirable and undesirable scenarios
- This is one of the most crucial, and hardest, tasks in the development of a software system.
- **Ignorance hiding:** One of the basic traits of a good systems analyst is the ability to hide her ignorance, or more precisely, to find her way around in a new problem area quickly.

## Information Acquisition

- The term "Information Acquisition" should not suggest that the information needed by the analyst is explicitly available somewhere (document, someone's head,...) and all the analyst has to do is find the source and fetch it (by reading or asking)
  - This is often wrong*
- The information needed may have to be extracted through analysis, interpretation and synthesis from a variety of sources
- For example, consider a loan approval department where the analyst wants to find out the rule(s) for loan approval; these may not exist anywhere (in company documents or people's heads) and may even have contradictory manifestations within the same department
- The *say-do* problem: people know how to do many things they normally don't describe (*tacit knowledge*); descriptions of such things may be highly inaccurate

## What Information to Acquire?



## The Four Worlds

- **Subject World** -- describes the subject matter of the information system; e.g., customers, accounts, transactions for a bank information system
- **Usage World** -- describes the environment within which the planned system will operate; e.g., agents who play a role in the usage world, such as managers, clerks, customers; also business processes such as handling a withdrawal, a deposit of foreign currency,...
- **System World** -- describes what the system does within its operational environment, what information it contains and what functions it performs; e.g., system records all transactions in a database, reports on transactions for a particular account, gives account balance,...
- **Development World** -- describes the development process, team, schedule, required qualities (security, performance,...) etc.; e.g., system must be delivered within 12 months, level 3 software processes to be used during its development, must handle up to 1000 transactions per second,...

## Scenarios

- One useful form of information to gather involves desirable or undesirable sequences of events.
- For example, for a hospital admission system, you may ask:
  - "Suppose I'm admitted into the hospital; what happens during my admission?"
- The answer may be like
  - "You, or the person accompanying you, talk to the person at the admissions desk; you have to show your OHIP card and explain who referred you to the hospital; then..."
- Some scenarios describe undesirable sequences of events, such as
  - "You won't be admitted if you don't produce your OHIP card".
- Out of scenarios, one can build the general business processes used by the organization being studied, also use cases for the system-to-be.

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## Stakeholders (Actors)

Who are the people who must be consulted during information acquisition? These are the **stakeholders**, all those who have a say of some sort on the new system. Stakeholders include:


- ✓ **Users** - who are concerned about the features and the functionality of the new system
- ✓ **Designers** - who want to build a perfect system, or reuse existing code
- ✓ **Systems analysts** - who want to "get the requirements right"
- ✓ **Training and user support staff** - who want to make sure the new system is usable and manageable
- ✓ **Business analysts** - want to make sure "we are doing better than the competition"
- ✓ **Technical authors** - who will prepare user manuals and other documentation for the new system
- ✓ **The project manager** - who wants to complete the project on time, within budget, and with all objectives met.

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## Information Acquisition Techniques

- **Sampling** hard data -- forms, applications,...
- **Background reading** -- reports, memos, etc.
- **Interviewing** -- meeting with people and asking questions.
- **Questionnaires** -- distribute a questionnaire to relevant people, collect their responses and analyze them.
- **Observation** -- spending some time observing the organizational setting where the new system will be deployed.



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## Hard Data

- **Facts and figures**, financial information, organizational contexts, document types, problems,....
- **Reports used for decision making** -- such as status of inventory, sales, production,...
- **Performance reports** -- usually take the form of actual vs expected; second derivatives are important (if there is a gap, is it widening or narrowing)
- **Records** -- keep track of what's happening, important to keep them up to date

**Data capture forms are very important!**  
**Collect them, study them before changing them!!!**

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## Hard Data: An Example

Mr.  Ms.  Mrs.  Miss  Dr.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ Prov \_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_

Phone No. H ( ) \_\_\_\_\_ B( ) \_\_\_\_\_

I am interested in:

receiving United Way Newsletter

receiving information on United Way community fund

including United Way in my will

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## Another Example : Agate

### Agate

**Campaign Summary**

**Date:** 23rd February 1999

**Client:** Yellow Partridge  
Park Road Workshops  
Park Road  
Jewellery Quarter  
Birmingham B2 3DT  
U.K.

**Campaign:** Spring Collection 1999

**Billing Currency:** GB £

Item	Curr	Amount	Rate	Billing amount
Advert preparation: photography, artwork, layout etc.	GB £	15,000.00	1	15,000.00
Placement French Vogue	FFr.	47,000.00	11.35	4,140.97
Placement UK Vogue	GB £	5,000.00	1	5,000.00
Placement US Vogue	US \$	15,000.00	2.47	4,072.87
<b>Total</b>				<b>30,213.84</b>

This is not a VAT Invoice. A detailed VAT Invoice will be provided separately.

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## Sampling Hard Data

**What information does the systems analyst pay attention too in understanding an organization?**

- **Sampling** is the process of systematically selecting representative elements of a population
- Sampling is useful because it minimizes costs during data gathering
- Designing a good sample
  - ✓ Determine the data to be described -- e.g., banking transactions
  - ✓ Determine the population to be sampled -- e.g., transactions in five local branches for one week
  - ✓ Choose type of sampling -- convenience, purposive, random
  - ✓ Decide on the sample size -- consider every 10th transaction

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## Sampling Hard Data

- **Type of sampling** is very important in determining how representative a sample is.
  - ✓ **Purposive sampling** amounts to choosing population elements the analyst considers important, with no regard to statistical or other issues, e.g., choose a particular group of bank customers and look at the transactions they generate.
  - ✓ **Random sampling** can be **simple** (choose every kth element of the population) **stratified** (identify strata, sample each one) or **clustered** (choose representative sub-population, sample it)
- **Sample size** decision depends on the cost involved in collecting the samples and the required confidence; standard statistical techniques can be used to calculate the required sample size given the required confidence.

## Document Sampling

- Can be used to gather quantitative data, such as average number of lines on an invoice.
  - + Can be used to find out about error rates in paper documents;
  - If the system is going to change dramatically, existing documents may not reflect how it will be in the future.
- **Appropriate situations:**
  - ✓ Almost always appropriate;
  - ✓ Paper-based documents give a good idea of what is happening in the current system;
  - ✓ Provide supporting evidence for the information gathered from interviews or observation;
  - ✓ The statistical approach is appropriate in situations where large volume of data are being processed and particularly where error rates are high and a reduction in errors is required.

## Background Reading

- Suitable sources of information: company reports, organization charts, policy manuals, job descriptions, reports, documentation of existing systems, etc.
- **Advantages:**
  - ✓ Helps the analyst to get an understanding of the organization before meeting the people who work there.
  - ✓ Allows the analyst to prepare for other types of fact finding, for example, by being aware of the business objectives of the organization.
  - ✓ Documentation on the existing system may provide formally defined information requirements for the current system.
- **Obvious disadvantage:** written documents often do not match up to reality.
- **Appropriate situations:** for projects where the analyst is not familiar with the organization being investigated.

## Interviewing

- Used to acquire information from stakeholders -- managers, users, domain experts,...
- Interviews have to be planned ahead of time -- what questions to ask?...what information to look for in answers?...
- Interviewing a skill that has to be mastered -- often people can't articulate their perceptions or their needs.
- Interviewing intended to acquire hard facts but also opinions, feelings, goals and informal procedures.



## Conducting the Interview

- Begin the interview with an innocuous topic, e.g., the weather, the score in last night's hockey game, an object on the person's desk. Sets people at ease, e.g., "My... what a beautiful photograph! Did you take that?"
- Ask if you can record the interview, but put tape recorder in front of person and say that they can turn it off any time.
- Ask easy questions first - perhaps personal information, e.g., "How long have you worked in your present position?"
- Follow up interesting leads, things people say that indicate that your plan of action may be wrong, e.g., "Could we pursue what you just said a little further?"
- Ask open-ended questions last, e.g., "Is there anything else you would like to add?"

## Advantages in Using Interviews

### Advantages in using interviews:

- ✓ Personal contact allows the analyst to be responsive and adapt to what the user says.
  - ✓ The analyst can probe in greater depth about the person's work than can be achieved with other methods.
  - ✓ If the interviewee has nothing to say, the interview can be terminated.
- ### Disadvantages:
- ✓ Time-consuming and can be the costliest form of fact gathering.
  - ✓ Interview results require the analyst to work on them after the interview: the transcription of tape recordings or writing up notes.
  - ✓ Interviews can be subject to bias if the interviewer has a closed mind about the problem.
  - ✓ If different interviewees provide conflicting information, it can be difficult to resolve later.



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## Planning Information Acquisition

Objective	Technique	Subject(s)	Time commitment
To get background on the company and the advertising industry.	Background reading	Company reports, trade journals.	0.5 day
To establish business objectives. Agree likely scope of new system. Check out involvement of non-UK offices.	Interview	Two directors	2 x 1 hour each
To gain understanding of roles of each department. Check out line management and team structure in the Creative department. To agree likely interviewees among staff.	Interview	Department heads (only 1 account manager)	2 x 1 hour each
To find out how the core business operates.	Interview	1 account manager 1 graphic designer 1 copy writer 1 editor	1.5 hours each

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To follow up development of business understanding.	Observation	2 creative staff	0.5 day each
To determine role of support/admin staff and relationship to core business.	Interview	2 admin staff (based on experience with the company)	1.5 hours each
To establish what records and resources are kept.	Interview/ document sampling	Filing clerk Resource librarian	2 x 1 hour each
To determine what use is made of current computer system. To determine functionality of current system.	Interview	Computer manager	2 x 1 hour
To establish additional requirements for new system.	Interview	2 account managers 3 staff from Creative Department	3 x 1 hour each
To establish accounting requirements for new system.	Interview	Accountant Credit controller 1 purchasing assistant 1 accounts clerk	1.5 hours each

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## Meetings

- At the end of an information gathering phase, you need to meet with stakeholders to confirm what has been learned and start putting together a report on your finding.
- Later on in an information system project, meetings will be needed to conclude on a set of requirements, to agree on a design etc.
- Meetings are an important managerial tool in moving an information system development project forward.

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## Interpersonal Skills


- Determine meeting objectives -- presentation, problem solving, conflict resolution, progress analysis, gathering and merging of facts, training, planning,...
- Schedule the meeting and arrange for facilities
- Prepare agenda -- and distribute it well in advance
- Conduct the meeting -- may want to impose structure or leave it unstructured depending on objective; keep track of time, agenda
- Follow up on the meeting with a written summary to be distributed to meeting participants
- Special rules apply for formal presentations (and how to prepare them), project walkthroughs, brainstorming,...

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## Joint Application Development

- Also known as **Joint Application Design (JAD)** [August91]
- Originally developed by IBM, sponsored by IBM, James Martin and other user groups.
- Was first used successfully in Canada, by IBM.
- Has evolved over four different stages and has influenced heavily requirements engineering, also systems analysis and design.



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## JAD Principles

Method founded on the following principles:

- **Group Dynamics** -- one-to-one or group interview formats replaced with workshop settings
- **Visual Aids** -- it is difficult for a group to communicate about requirements and designs; JAD adopts a number of visualization media, ranging from wall charts to large monitors or graphical interfaces.
- **Organized, Rational Process** -- JAD adopts a variety of techniques, including brainstorming and top-down analysis ones, to structure the elicitation and analysis process
- **WYSIWYG Documentation Approach** -- each JAD session results in a document which is easy to understand and is created and agreed upon during the session

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## JAD Plan

- A JAD plan has four objectives: (i) Identify system requirements, (ii) Define and bound the system scope, (iii) Plan the JAD design activity (iv) Publish and obtain approval of the JAD plan
- Meetings should be planned for up to 15 participants, including:
  - ✓ **Session leader (facilitator)** -- sets the stage and directs a session; manages group dynamics; excellent interpersonal skills needed.
  - ✓ **Analyst** -- responsible for session documents; also contributes to the discussion; usually someone with systems analysis background
  - ✓ **Executive sponsor** -- someone who controls the funding and staffing for the project, i.e., represents upper level management; imparts strategic insights and makes high level commitments.
  - ✓ **User representative** -- she is the main focus of JAD; along with others, examines organizational needs and proposes requirements.
  - ✓ **Information system representative** -- assists in use of existing resources, offers IT expertise
  - ✓ **Specialist** -- provides expertise on a defined limited topic.

## Notes on JAD Workshops

- Choose workshop participants carefully -- they should be the best people possible representing the roles listed earlier.
- Session leader must turn group of participants into a team; this takes 1-2 days.
- Workshop should last 3-5 days.
- Session leader must keep track of agenda, make sure each step has been completed thoroughly.
- When there are differences of opinion, session leader should step in, put these up as "open issues".
- Meeting room should be well-equipped for presentations, recording etc.



Very useful technique!

## Ethnomethodology

- This is a subarea of anthropology. Its tries to identify cultural norms.
- A basic objective of ethnomethodology is to look for behaviours that may be different in a specific culture but which have the same underlying purpose or meaning.
- For example, one can look for the ways people go about gaining status in different cultures:
  - Frenchmen brag about sexual conquests to gain status;
  - Americans brag about money to gain status.

Each of these topics is taboo in the other culture

- The major difference between **ethnomethodology** and other subareas of anthropology and sociology is its adherence to a very tightly controlled set of methods.

## Ethnomethodological Techniques

- Ethnomethodologists use the following techniques
  - ✓ Conversational analysis
  - ✓ Measurement of body system functions - e.g., heartbeat
  - ✓ Non-verbal behaviour studies
  - ✓ Detailed video analysis
- These techniques have proven to be useful in capturing information about a social setting.
- In addition, several other observation technique from sociology and anthropology are often applied
  - ✓ Time-motion study - who is where, when
  - ✓ Communication audit - who talks to whom about what
  - ✓ Use of tools - status symbols plus sharing rules

## Why Ethnomethodology?

- The application of ethnomethodology -- or its more commonly used cousin **ethnography** -- can also bring about useful understandings of what the goals of the people using the underlying information system really are.
- This is because
  - ✓ Social order (including the concepts shared by a group of people engaged in a collective activity) is accomplished on a moment-to-moment basis, through participants' actions rather than through pre-existing categories that shape people's actions.
  - ✓ For example, the concept of "lecture" is shaped by actions of relevant people (e.g., booking a room, having a speaker, advertising,...) rather than any pre-defined concept.

## What's in a Lecture?

- If we study a lecture using ethnomethodology techniques, we soon discover an entire series of cultural details about a lecture that should affect how an information system is designed to run a lecture hall.
- Things an ethnomethodologist might observe about a lecture:
  - ✓ People sit in the same seat lecture after lecture;
  - ✓ People sitting close to the front ask more questions;
  - ✓ People sitting close to the back use more aggressive language...
  - ✓ People sitting close to the front take more notes;
  - ✓ The instructor arrives after/before the students;
  - ✓ Students stand when instructor arrives/ stop talking to each other/ start talking to each other,...

## ***Ethnomethodological Concepts***

- To understand social order, observation should be done in a ***natural setting***, not one constructed by the systems analyst.
- ***Members' categories***: Find the categories members themselves use to order the social world, rather than impose those of the analyst.
- ***Members' methods***: Use the same methods members use during observation, for example, by developing a legitimate role within the community under observation.

***Too expensive/time-consuming a method for many information system development projects!***

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