

assessment, the list is saved to disk, though it can also be updated in the light of further experience.

The self-assessment need be completed only once, then it can be recalled from disk and used to relate to any of several 'counterpart' lists. Up to eight counterpart assessments can be saved on disk. When two completed lists are present, the program takes the responses and evaluates them, then prepares a report that synthesises the characteristics of the user and his subject.

The following report, generated by Communication Edge, is based on a real user and counterpart (the user's teenage son), the latter being described as Mr. T (for Test). The report is presented as though the computer were speaking directly to the user:

'Your flexible, stable approach to people will be needed in communicating with Mr. T. He is a very private person who prefers being alone and who has very little patience with small talk or socialising. Expect a cynical or suspicious attitude as you solicit his ideas and feelings. In speaking to him, make few assumptions that he understands you. Be clear, concise and direct.'

'In contrast to your even-tempered style, Mr. T angers quickly and can even appear angry before the conversation begins. He may try to force his opinions on you. Remain cordial, despite this approach. Also be prepared for his unpredictability. He can speak impulsively one minute, while choosing every word with caution the next. Take on the role of guiding the process of the meeting. Paraphrase his comments to achieve clarity and agreement.'

Parents will probably recognise the description of a typical adolescent, although Communication

Edge asks no questions about the age of the subject (the person's sex is considered, however).

The vocabulary used by the reports will be familiar to those who read newspaper advice columns or who participate in similar personality quizzes. The user is generally portrayed in sympathetic terms ('even tempered, flexible, stable'), while the subject is less well-favoured ('angers quickly, unpredictable, cynical, suspicious'). This is probably designed to reinforce the user's self-image, and perhaps to fit current American management thinking of business as warfare, with the sales prospect or customer as the enemy whose resistance must be overcome.

This becomes even more obvious in Negotiation Edge, which recommends such strategies (printed in headline capitals) as:

USE MR T'S KNOWLEDGE TO YOUR
ADVANTAGE
SET MR T UP WITH EARLY CONCESSIONS
GET MR T IN THE HABIT OF SAYING "YES"
VEIL YOUR THREATS
EXAGGERATE YOUR PROBLEMS
DOWNPLAY YOUR PROFIT
SETTLE ON A GOOD NOTE

It seems to be assumed by the developers that a user will have only one of the four programs, since each requires the user to complete a separate self-assessment, presenting more or less identical questions in a slightly different order. In view of the price, this may be a reasonable assumption, but since a major organisation would be most likely to use them as management tools it would have been helpful to be able to use the same self-assessment in all four. But as the programs are so similar one could simply take the least expensive of the suite, Communication Edge, and adapt its reports to fit a variety of situations.

A serious weakness in the programs, if they are to be used as management tools, is their inability to learn from experience, leaving aside the user's own updating of assessments. For example, it would be valuable for the user to be able to enter the results of a proposed strategy so that it could be modified in the light of experience, especially in evaluating subjects of whom little is known initially. In addition, many of the questions are difficult to answer on a strict 'agree or disagree' basis, and there is no evidence of a tree structure to the questioning that would permit amplification or verification of answers. One solution might be the inclusion of a 'don't know' option, which would then open up the way to a lower-level question that could be answered positively or negatively.

In the final analysis, one either believes in this type of approach to human relations or one does not. Perhaps the most profitable way of using it would be as an aid to careful preparation before an interview, but then the user must beware of taking its advice too literally — at least until computers become real thinking machines.

The Human Edge

A suite of four packages (obtainable separately) for MS-DOS and PC-DOS machines

Prices:

Communication Edge £195.50, Sales Edge £241.50, Management Edge £241.50, Negotiation Edge £287.50

Distributor:

Thorn EMI Computer Software Distributors, 296 Farnborough Road, Farnborough, Hants GU14 7NF

Authors:

Human Edge Software, California

Format:

Disk

Mind Prober

For the Commodore 64, Apple II and Macintosh

Prices:

Commodore version £17.35, Apple II and Macintosh versions £26

Distributor:

As above

Authors:

As above

Format:

Disk

