

About Feb, 1971

Dear Mr. Packard:

I've been meaning to write right for months to tell you how proud we are of your work in Washington. The job itself must be one of the most difficult in the country, but all reports I've read give you credit for straightening out operations in a particularly trying period.

Winding down the war and getting some of that spending re-programmed back into research and technology seems to be critically needed. The main reason I write to you is that I don't know who in Washington is concerned with decisions in the area of program management of national priorities?

A few of us at Hewlett-Packard were talking the other day about the demise of NASA. It seemed to us that we are losing a hard-bought resource. It's the massive management team that has been so successful in putting together a major system. It's the **macro** system thinking of the team and the whole concept of the systems global approach to the problem.

When I remember dealing with certain agencies of the government in my job at HP, I begin to see the problem. For example, the FAA has probably had the worst track record on really getting ahead of their problems. For years they have been behind, and are being dragged into rather than creatively and aggressively planning ahead. I presume you may have had similar impressions in your dealings with certain agencies long before I came to HP? But in 1960, it was clear that our electronics and computer technology could easily handle aircraft and aerodrome control with its then present state-of-the-art. Yet six or seven years later, controllers were still pushing paper markers across the green felt table to juggle our flying lives in a grossly compounded air-traffic snarl. To me it's an obvious lack of systems thinking.

I'm just using FAA as one example. It seems to me however that they stayed with their traditional propeller age thinking perhaps because the background of their managers was fixed in those days.

Now let me express my concern. Take any major national problem that may get increased spending in the next year – law and order, for example. Presumably this will be implemented by the Justice Department. And that's where the problem starts – but won't be evident for five years because there's no one in Justice that has the management concept of a major communication/computer system on a macro scale. I think it's really the management team that's important in the way they structure a program.

Now take any of a dozen other national priorities – air and water pollution, rapid transit, education, computer-assisted medical care, oceanographic work, smog free cars, post office systems, air traffic control, etc. Most of the agencies who may become responsible for these programs aren't prepared to manage systems wise.

I think that's the shame of breaking up NASA's magnificent team. From my viewpoint it's been the most successful agency of the government; professional, technically competent, aggressive, results-oriented; not so caught up with bureaucratic ways. There must be a way to reprogram their efforts in these crucial national priorities rather than start up new teams that probably don't even understand the system thinking.

From your experience in the affairs of the government, is there a person or group I could write my concerns to?

Again it's been a source of great personal pride to have known you at HP. And to see the excellent progress you're making in Washington.

John Minck

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4 May 1971

Mr. John L. Minck
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Dear John:

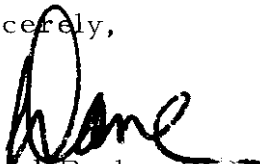
Please pardon my delay in answering your letter of April 3rd. Actually, there is not much I can say by way of encouragement in answering some of the questions you have raised. There is no doubt that many Federal activities need more imaginative management, but I assure you the environment here is not very conducive to getting some of these things done.

I share your evaluation about NASA. It is an effective organization and I believe it has been effective for two reasons -- one, it has had an imaginative inspiring goal, and second, it is a relatively new agency. We may, in fact, see some progress with the Post Office, simply because that is being set up in a new structure, and this is very likely to make it possible to bring some more ideas into the organization.

There are a good many people around Washington worrying about the very issues you have raised. To be perfectly frank, I just don't know what I could suggest that you could do. You can probably contribute just as much to the progress of mankind from where you are as you could by talking to anyone anywhere in Washington at this time.

Thanks again for your interest. If something comes to my attention that I think would interest you here, I will certainly let you know.

Sincerely,



David Packard