



System Selection

Problem Presented

I was asked to help a company with the selection of software for one particular department.

Action

The process was carried out in several stages. Firstly I talked to senior staff to determine why they wanted a system. Then some suppliers came in to demonstrate their software. This helped the staff get an idea of how their job might change with modern systems.

I then carried out an exercise to identify the company's exact needs. In particular I did not confine myself to the original department. I also spoke to the departments they communicated with. By talking to everyone affected I was able to determine **all** the relevant requirements.

These were then prioritised by the managers. In the meantime I identified several companies as having relevant systems and these were sent the requirements. The suppliers responded with detailed answers regarding how they would meet the business needs, as well as full costs.

From these responses a shortlist was drawn up and further demonstrations took place. The staff discussed the various options and the preferred system was selected.

It is useful to note that from an early point in the selection process I start to prepare a detailed Implementation Plan, which will serve as a guide later in the project.

Actual Problem

There were two problems with the company's approach before I was involved.

Firstly, everyone had assumed that a particular system would be selected, because it was the only name most people knew. (In much the same way as Sage is the only accounting software people can name.) Once demonstrations took place, with the requirements clarified, it was apparent that other systems were more appropriate.

Secondly, by looking at the links to other departments we ensured that implementation would involve all the relevant people. As a result it was much easier than it might have been, and supported by all affected.

Outcome

The staff and management all felt much more confident that the correct decision had been made after appropriate consideration, rather than the company sleep-walking into a decision.

The benefits of the selected system were very clear and even now staff still express delight at how good their system is.