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Systems not working the way they should

Problem Presented
I was asked by a UK group to investigate how their main software system, used at several locations, could produce meaningful management reports.

Action
I initially met staff at each site to discuss how they were using the system, and to review the issues that affected them in their day-to-day work. It quickly became apparent that there was no consistency in how the system was used at the different sites. One result of this was that each user received little benefit from the system. For example, they often kept separate spreadsheets to handle areas which the system should have covered.

I also discussed with departmental managers their current business strategy, and how they considered the business and its priorities might change over the next few years. From this we identified areas where reports produced from the system could help.

After analysing the results of all my conversations I helped to develop and agree a consistent way of using the system across all the sites which would mean it met the staff's needs, and that reports produced from it would also meet the needs of management.

Actual Problem
There was no consistency between how staff used the system, so reports could not produce consistent results or useful management information. The result was that in this area of the business, management decision-making was not well-informed and was also inconsistent across the company.

Outcome
The staff were provided with agreed, consistent procedures ("Best Practice"). They were trained to follow them, and understood that by using the system in this way their own requirements would be met.

As a result, management received better information from the system both because of the improved way it was being used, and also because new reports were now available which helped address particular business issues.

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