

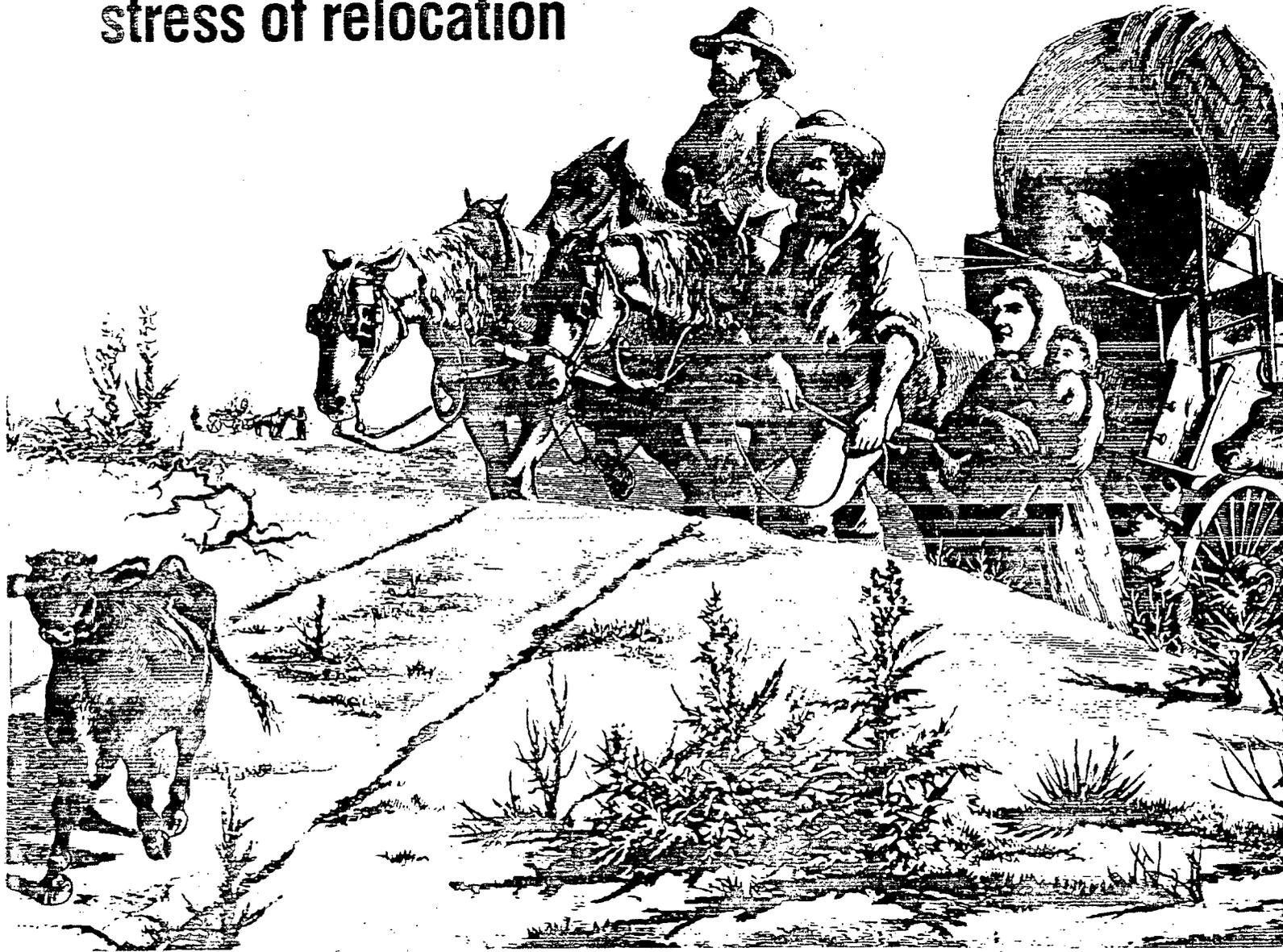
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MANAGEMENT REVIEW

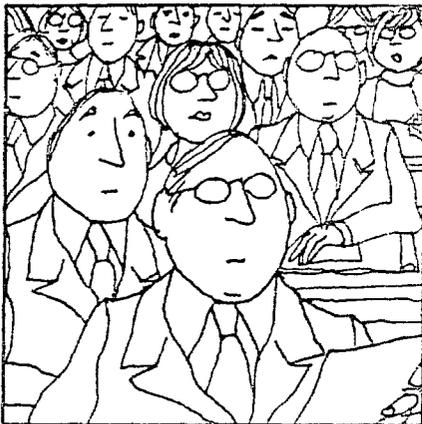
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Getting the best results from a newly installed automated information control system often depends on how management conducts . . .

The post-implementation review

PAUL S. BENOIT

COMPUTERIZED INFORMATION SYSTEMS fall short of their objectives unless they are well-managed. The post-implementation review phase of automated information system development work is a crucial time for exerting management control. The review provides management with a feedback mechanism that can measure the project results and gather data necessary to analyze what, if any, corrective action is required before beginning another system development effort.

Broadly speaking, management wants to know whether the system was developed, converted, and implemented within cost estimates; whether it was im-

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plemented on schedule; whether its performance is acceptable; whether actual benefits are at least equal to the projected benefits; whether it is operating within cost estimates; and what corrective action is required.

The project leader, together with members of the original development, conversion, and implementation team, performs the post-implementation review. During the review, facts are gathered and analyzed to measure project objectives against the results. Significant deviations, such as plus or minus variations established by the organization as unacceptable, are identified and analyzed. Appropriate recommendations for corrective action are developed. A post-implementation review report is written and submitted to management.

Identifying objectives

Identifying the project objectives is a necessary first step in determining whether they were met. The system proposal that documented the original recommendation to management for system development, conversion, and im-

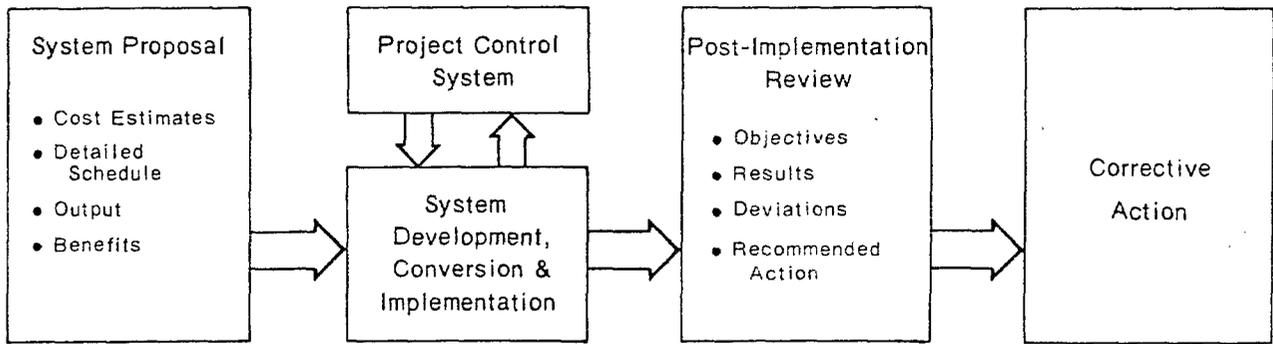
plementation should provide the review team with the developmental, conversion, and implementation cost estimates; the detailed schedule for developing, converting, and implementing the system; the layout of the proposed system; the quantitative and qualitative benefits expected; and the estimated cost of operating the system.

Measuring results

Gathering the data to be used in measuring results against the objectives is the next step in the post-implementation review process. Actual costs through implementation and completion date information should be available from the organization's project control system and/or financial accounting records.

Since systems are designed for users, the user's satisfaction is the ultimate test of whether the system is performing according to design specifications. Interviews and questionnaires are two ways of collecting the desired information. A third way is to review data frequently maintained within the data processing organization to identify danger signals that

System Overview: From Start to Finish—and Review



indicate less than satisfactory system performance and/or problems with the basic proposal, development, conversion, and implementation process. Examples of such danger signals are:

- A high error reject or rerun rate; a high incidence of untimely, inaccurate, or incomplete output; and a high degree of user dependency on data processing personnel for instruction on interfacing with the new system.
- A large amount of hardware downtime and frequent changes in nonapplication system software, in basic system design, and in the application program.
- Numerous input layout redesigns, master file recreates, abnormal application program terminations, and output layout redesigns.

Determining whether the quantifiable and nonquantifiable benefits were achieved may require considerable effort depending on the complexity of the project objectives. In general, benefits derived from developing and implementing information systems fall into two categories: (1) lowering costs and (2) obtaining more accurate, complete, or timely information that is in turn used to further the organization's goals. During the review, facts and figures will have to be obtained from a variety of sources, sorted, and analyzed in order to arrive at meaningful conclusions. Actual costs for operating the system should be available

from the organization's financial records.

Determining corrective action

Once deviations and danger signals are identified, the root causes must be determined by the review team. For example, a slipped target date may indicate any number of problems such as poor estimating techniques, an inadequate work breakdown structure, or a project control system with an inadequate feedback mechanism. A high reject error rate may indicate that user personnel were poorly trained in preparing input for the new system or that input layouts are confusing. A high rerun rate may indicate that personnel were poorly trained in processing data under the new system or that there is a complete lack of, or inadequately prepared, processing instructions.

The causes of the deviation and danger signals will generally fit into the following categories:

- Lack of clear objectives or clearly delegated responsibility and accountability.
- Inadequately detailed plans for achieving objectives, insufficiently staffed project, under trained staff, or poorly motivated and coordinated personnel.
- Inadequate resources allocated to the project; a need for standardized procedures for personnel to follow; weak

organizational structure; poorly drawn performance standards; an inadequate measuring and feedback system; or a failure to take appropriate corrective action.

The categories listed above were developed from a generalized management process model (R. Alex Mackenzie, *Harvard Business Review*, November/December 1969). The fact that the causes of the deviations and danger signals fit so logically into these categories leads to the conclusion that system development, conversion, and implementation failures can be attributed, largely or entirely, to a bypassing of basic management process functions. The Mackenzie or other management process models can be used as guidelines for arriving at recommended corrective actions. For instance, to follow through on the high reject rate example used earlier, a recommendation might be that user personnel be given additional training. Once the recommended corrective actions are developed, the post-implementation review report is made final and submitted to management.

After receiving the report, management takes appropriate action. This action will generally involve management process improvement, procedural documentation or standardization, or the upgrading of personnel skills. However, in more extreme cases, management may have to terminate employees or abort the newly implemented system. •