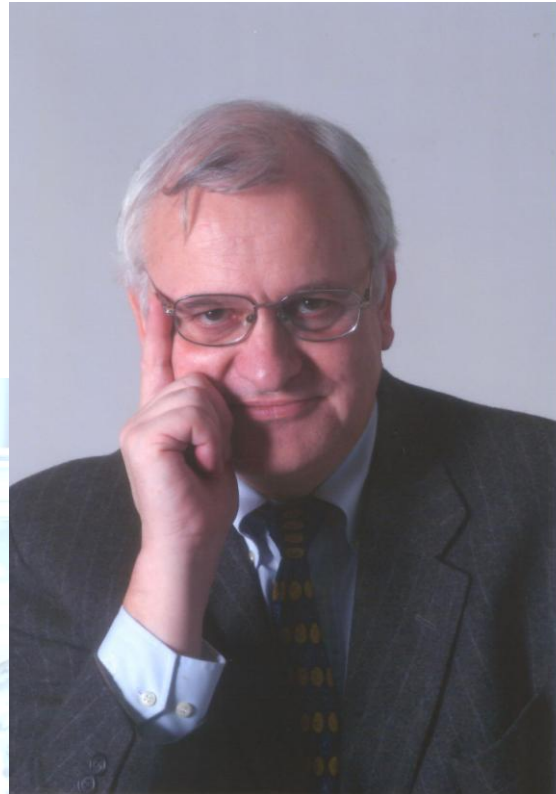


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ITMatters

In this regular column Charles Zealey of ITSolve covers all aspects of business and personal computing. If you have a question about IT matters, email it to Charles on itmatters@itsolve.co.uk



Realising the Benefits

Why is it that so many IT projects fail to measure up to the expectations we have of them? From the largest multi-billion pound project, to the £15 we spend on a PC package, disappointment is often the first reaction. Why is it?

First things first

We have covered the subject in the column before, so regular readers will not be surprised to see me say that it is due to a failure to understand the project's requirements properly. At whatever level, those responsible for purchase the system or the software tend to focus on what the proposed solutions can do, rather on needs.

The technologist will talk about the ever increasing capability of a particular system. Never mind that they are probably being over optimistic about both capability and timescale, the technological capability is irrelevant if it does not meet a need.

The software salesman will talk about the capabilities of the software, the flexibility and ability to integrate with other packages, without really being able to demonstrate *how* it will meet the users' requirements.

Make a list

So how do we address this problem, and try to ensure that the system we procure really does meet the needs we have? The best way to start is to make a list of all the requirements we can think of. Try to imagine life after the installation of your new

system. What will a day look like? What will be better than it is now? What improvement in productivity do we expect to see? Some of these requirements will be quite detailed, but don't worry it will all help at the end of the day.

Then try to put specific criteria against each one; make them measurable so you will be able to tick off the boxes at the end of the project; then categorise them in some simple way – perhaps 'Mandatory', 'Desirable', or 'Nice-to-have'.

Only then can you start to match up possible solutions against your requirements. Almost certainly you will need to make some compromises but the requirements should keep you honest. When you said 'Mandatory' did you really mean it?

It must be worth it!

There is a lot of work involved, and you may need to employ external people, but you will experience the benefits of getting the decision right over a long period; while the costs and frustrations of a poor choice will endure equally long.

Charles Zealey is a consultant working with business professionals helping them to improve their organisation's productivity and effectiveness with the use of Information Technology. Typically a return on investment can be achieved with 6-12 months. To access help sheets go to www.itsolve.co.uk/HelpSheets/. For a free half-hour consultation on business IT issues phone 01635 869863 or email lisa@itsolve.co.uk.

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