MIS – A DECISION SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR MANAGEMENT

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SUMMARY

The MIS system is a system developed for management within Marketing and Sales at Volvo Car Corporation in Gothenburg, Sweden. The project started in 1986 and MIS has become a strategic product and a powerful support for management in their decision making. We have in MIS put together information from many different areas, for example sales, stocks, car market development, finance and research and we present this information in a clear and understandable way complemented with many different graphic display possibilities.

The objective for the MIS project was: providing decision makers within Marketing & Sales with “management information” on a range of key areas and key markets. The guiding principle in our work was to “create order”.

In the first place MIS is developed for our Management Group, but we have gradually spread the use of the system and we have today some 100 users. As we have a considerable difference in computer experience among the users, we have made great efforts in keeping a uniform layout throughout the whole system and also to keep the system self instructive.

The success factors for the MIS system is that we began to sell in the idea from the top and down through the organization, and that practically the entire organization was involved and last the close contact between the work group and the steering committee.

THE FIRST IDEAS

The first time MIS was mentioned at Volvo Car Corporation was in early 1985. At that time the objective was: Providing decision-makers within Marketing and Sales at Volvo Car with “Management Information” on a range of key areas and key markets. To achieve this objective you had to clearly define what the system were to consist of, which areas you should have in MIS and to which levels the aggregations were to be done.

Even in 1985 we had a lot of different systems at Volvo Car which were possible sources. What we didn’t have was an information system where you easily could get hold of the information required.

The Management Group already from the beginning put a number of requirements for the system. They were:
* Easy to use
* Availability
* Valid information
* Structured information.

We, who worked in the project also came up with some requirements on our Management Group. They had to consider:
* Risks/Possibilities of MIS as a concept
* Use of terminals for information retrieval
* What information did they want to have in MIS
* Better decisions with a MIS system?

In January 1986 management decided that we should start the project work and the guiding principle were to be: CREATE ORDER!!

PROJECT WORK

What methods did we use?

A work group was set up, consisting of people both from the Information System department and from different line departments. A steering committee was appointed. It was important that the members of this committee came from strategic important positions and had a great influence on our organization.

We began by producing a number of demo displays, which were first shown to the steering committee and after their acceptance shown to practically everyone concerned. Everyone was asked to put forward their ideas, complaints and suggested improvements.

Throughout these months we had an intensive dialogue with our steering committee. A large part of our work was to sort out what was really "Management Information".

In this phase of the project SAS was chosen as programming language. The choice was between SAS and Cobol/DS2. The reasons for choosing SAS was:
* Shorter development time
* Easier retrieval
* Better opportunities for simulation
* Attractive graphics
* Easier maintenance.

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PROGRAMMING PHASE

Building up knowhow

For both of us, the products SAS and ISPF were completely new, which meant that programming was time consuming at first, but we gradually built up a good pool of know-how.

Installation in stages

Instead of installing the entire system at once we chose to install it in stages and the first installation was in January 1987.

MIS is in the first place developed for our management group and they were the only ones who to start with had access to the system. Today we have some 100 users.

Updating systems

The large amount of data we have in MIS is automatically transferred from our operating systems, but we also have some parts which are updated manually. Each person updating is also responsible for the information they put in.

Uniform layout

To make MIS clear and easy to read and understand we have made a big effort to make a uniform layout throughout the whole system. There were also high demands on all pictures being of good quality.

Security

An information system like this demands a very high standard of security and secrecy. We therefore produced our own security system for MIS. This is used on top of Volvos normal security system. You may only access information which you have been expressly cleared for and clearance may be given down to market level.

TODAY AND FUTURE

Today almost all parts of the MIS system have been installed and we are now planning a major effort to market the system again and show its full potential to help our users get the most out of the system. Because there is a considerable difference in computer experience among our users, training and marketing are constantly needed.

We live in a changeable world and we have tried to create a flexible system to be able to live up to all the changes.

In five years' time we may be showing completely different pictures in MIS. It must be a living system.

EXPERIENCES

The success factors for the MIS system is that we began to sell in the idea from the top and down through the organization, and that practically the entire organization was involved - everyone knew that we were working on a management information system and felt they were taking and active part - and at last the close contact between the work group and the steering committee.