

I - INTRODUCTION

How to manage and exploit information

Today is information of outstanding importance for a company. In a world where speed (and accuracy) of reaction are decisive arguments in race to profitability, it is surprising to note at which point problems related to information in a company are at the same time many, complex and seemingly insolvable.

Information transmission

Static information is useless : only its circulation within company allows it to be exploited at best.

The traditional solution (paper report) henceforth is competed with by data-processing solutions allowing all existing data to be exploited. When company is equipped with one or more networks, users are connected each other via their workstations.

Information transmission results then in its passage through one or more networks, from a workstation to another, therefore from a user to another.

However, if information travels without any problem within the same environment, the multiplicity of platforms, operating systems, graphic interfaces and application softwares involves sometimes important data exchange problems.

Information translation - Data encoding

In order to be treated by a software, information must be translated into a proper format. This is the data encoding. A data is no more than an information encoded under a specific format, in order to be processed by a specific software.

But current softwares were not developed in an opening way and are unable to converse in a common language : there is not single format for data encoding.

So a same information can be translated into three different formats by three softwares... And result of one software can not be directly exploited by another (files must be imported through filters, data converted, etc).

Finally, even if the information travels through network(s), it can not be directly exploited.

Information exploitation

Besides transmission and coding problems making this exploitation difficult, variety of user interfaces and ergonomics increases confusion.

Each software has indeed its own commands and techniques (data selection, input, handling) the user must learn and adapt to everytime he switches from one to another.

A software can sometimes treat only data of a specific type (no image in a spreadsheet, no graphic in a word processor, etc).

Moreover, each software owns its data and is unable to pick some elsewhere. A bridge is necessary to temporarily switch the user to a new environment (different coding, interface and ergonomics) in order to exploit these "external" data. User turns back in the initial environment at the end of treatment.

Human resources exploitation

Human factor takes a large part in efficient management and information exploitation : ability for several users to access simultaneously a same information (no hierarchical level), ability for several users to work on a same support (groupware), etc.

But proposed solutions are not always neat nor simple.

The STEP ONE solution : a new approach to the information

Unifying system

STEP ONE is a multi-platform system, conceived upon a unique data coding format. Its opening ability allows to handle "external" data as easily as its own, while keeping a unique and homogeneous working environment.

Simpleness and realism of the user interface

Designed to reproduce reality, STEP ONE allows the user to handle data just like he will do on his desk, without being saddled with conceptual *objects* (windows, pop-up menus, dialog boxes, etc.).

The information support is a file with an unique format, called **document**. It is equivalent to a paper sheet : an inert surface, on which data of all types and all origins will be put.

The treatments applied to these data (page lay-out, creation of composite documents, calculations, customized treatments) are gathered by fonctionnalités and performed by so many programs, called **actors**. Just like the persons we are working with daily, these actors are our collaborators : they are permanently listening, ready to start the dialogue.

They do have the required intelligence for the data processing : indeed, when they receive instructions (which treatment to apply, how, on which data), they first analyze the data and then carry out the instructions consequently.

Groupware

Several users can work simultaneously on the same document which then becomes a support for group work like real time mailing, professional training, design of composite documents, etc.

Integration and opening to existing systems

Finally, STEP ONE is an open system : it is fully integrated into existing system and supplies interfaces towards standard softwares (ability to access external data, to process them and to send them back). Data will be so dynamically exchanged with the outside and become accessible to everyone.

STEP ONE turns into a genuine center for dynamic exchange of informations.