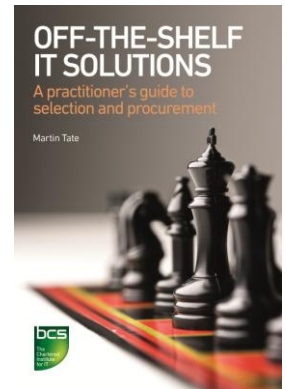


## *Compilation of Executive Viewpoints From Off-The-Shelf IT Solutions*



### About this document

This document compiles the *Executive Perspectives* from the [book](#). These are effectively user experience statements from clients who have been through the method. It is intended for people who may be interested in the approach, but don't want the nuts and bolts of the method.

My publisher [BCS](#) agreed to a separate index of them. It is at page xii, the *List of Executive Perspectives*. This means somebody considering buying the book for their staff can skip through reading just those pages that reveal the benefits of the method.

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## Introduction: Purpose and principles

### *A division head experiences surprising reactions*

When I first came across the software selection method, I was initially somewhat wary of it. As a person who trusts his instincts, I felt it was a 'sledgehammer to crack a nut': why did we need such a complicated and apparently bureaucratic process for such a simple problem? I gradually became a convert, though, for five reasons.

- The method is rigorous, thorough and robust, with enough flexibility to capture all software, training and documentation needs but enough structure to make sure everything is covered.
- We found the process easier and more enjoyable than we expected and everyone saw both the logic of the approach and how important it was to participate. Those who were not on the initial software selection working party started demanding to be let in as the project gained momentum.
- As more people used it, they saw how well it helped them articulate and record their thoughts on what they wanted, so everyone got the necessary sense of ownership of their bit of the process, which helped them stay focused and on track.
- Potential vendors, when they saw the number and calibre of questions that emerged from the process about their offerings, immediately stopped trying to blind everyone with marketing 'flannel' and started treating us as intelligent customers. They soon realised that they faced instant rejection if they didn't quickly raise their game and wheel out their experts for us to talk to.
- At the end, we had something that stood up to the scrutiny of the decision makers and answered all their questions, giving everyone confidence that we had the correct result that could not be overturned during the purchasing approval process without very good reason. We could all sleep at night, knowing that we had got it right!

## Chapter 1: Introduction to off-the-shelf solutions

### *An IT manager's experience of make versus buy*

Often IT is challenged with the decision to either build its own software or buy something in. I work with a large population of engineers, so you will always get 'nobody can build this better than us!' Which may have stood true at some point back in time.

The software market has matured enough for good solid off-the-shelf software to be available. The problem is how do you bring the diehard in-house engineers along with you in the decision that off-the-shelf is the right answer. When faced with exactly that problem the IT selection process in this book involved all key stakeholders. It let even the most troublesome people have their say and know their input will go into the final decision.

Developing in-house software is like a never-ending story with too much temptation to change, over-ambitious developers and constant bug fixes and maintenance. If we had gone down the development route, I am sure it would have ended in disaster, as a later and unexpected reduction in our capital programmes meant we would have never been able to complete a multi-year development project with anything meaningful to use.

The software selection process enabled us to really put the software vendors to task, comparing apples to apples and putting us in a very strong negotiation position. We had all the benefits of spreading the enormous development costs over multiple customers by buying off-the-shelf. Having been involved in this process from end to end, I can honestly say that you will never have any second thoughts of whether you made the right decision as this process puts the decision in everyone's hands.

## Chapter 2: Talent management: supplier psychology

### *A senior sales executive's experience as candidate supplier*

Software suppliers love projects where there is a good technical fit, a short sales cycle with a low cost of sale, painless win-win negotiation and a successful implementation leading to fantastic benefits. This leads to healthy revenue, and a good PR story and a reference-able customer, which particularly in the UK is paramount to building further success.

Too often, we enter sales cycles where we have to do a lot of work to find out what the actual question is. What do they want? How are they going to make a decision? Who is the competition? Has anyone already influenced the basis of decision? Do we have a fair chance of winning?

When I came across a prospective customer using the method in this book, I knew it would be a well-run, open and fair process, and I wasn't wrong. We received clear documentation on the consensus requirements, including critical areas, how the decision was going to be made, the timeframe, who we were up against, and what was expected from us to demonstrate evidence. This made it an easy decision on whether to participate, the risks were known and we knew what we needed to do to win. The rest was up to us.

With any opportunity using a systematic method, if we are not selected but the basis of decision is clear, we have to admit we were not the right partner and learn from this for future projects. It helps knowing it has been open and fair, and it was our decision to participate with the risks we identified. Either way, knowing the question early in the process ensures we can be efficient in our use of resources and maximise the opportunity of winning for a low cost of sale.

## Chapter 3: Initiation: shaping and authorising the project

### *A financial IT specialist's experience of formal scoping*

Back in 2008, when our company was relatively small, we decided to replace our fragmented business systems with a new ERP system. Time was short, the budget was tight and – as we urgently required a solution – we selected an ERP system that fit our budget and met our basic requirements at the time. Within three years, our company had grown significantly and we found that our ERP system could no longer cope with the demand.

We realised that the first system selection lacked long-term consideration for business strategy and forecasted growth. In addition, we didn't properly evaluate the functionality that was required across the business and the integration between the various parts of the organisation. We therefore agreed to implement a more methodical and comprehensive evaluation, one that would look at both immediate and long-term requirements.

During formal consideration of project scope using the method here, the team spotted an opportunity to merge two selections and attempt to find one solution. We did so. A year later, supplier estimates showed the external cost with this approach would be roughly £18m less over 10 years.

### *A director's experience of early, formal consultation*

The most successful changes start with winning the hearts and minds of people. I sponsored the implementation of a new set of business tools and wanted to start engaging people early. This methodology met that need as people were asked their opinion at the very start of the process.

I soon found that many of the most vocal, and historically those people most resistant to change, became the greatest advocates for the solution chosen. This is because they felt that they were instrumental in making the change, rather than it being done to them.

Harnessing the intellectual power within the business also produced a far better understanding for what was needed by the business than anything I could have produced in isolation.

## Chapter 4: Requirements analysis: capturing the organisational needs

### *A project manager's experience of formal requirements capture*

I was first introduced to this selection process by a colleague who had used the method for a different project. As the project manager for the selection of a global internet portal solution to replace a manual process, I was faced with many challenges:

- Coordinating a team of stakeholders from several European countries with local autonomy
- Merging requirements from varying levels of process maturity
- Lack of a common vision for the ultimate solution.

While the evaluation team members were already aware of some of the company politics, what made the real difference was the systematic method we followed.

The project team were able to agree a common set of global requirements very quickly. The method had the effect of breaking down inter-cultural barriers. Good documentation and clarity of progress supported a consistent interpretation of the requirements and kept all members engaged and motivated. The less mature parts of the organisation were represented fairly rather than being outvoted by their more mature counterparts.

I was also able to concentrate on managing the project and the team, knowing the content was being taken care of by the method. I had great confidence in the stakeholders agreeing the ultimate decision, since the requirements and weightings had been agreed through consensus, forming a solid basis of decision.

A structured approach was critical in selling the project internally to management for release of funding for the next phase. The team were able to provide evidence that due diligence had been carried out on the decision reached.

## Chapter 5: Requirements document: documenting and agreeing requirements

### *An IT support provider's experience of weighted requirements*

We used the evaluation method to select the best-fit ERP software package in a moderately complex manufacturing environment.

The weighting meeting crystallised the requirements' relative importance and the weighting technique produced a highly useful deliverable against which to measure prospective suppliers' products.

In our case, where no package was found to have an exact fit, it had a welcome additional benefit of facilitating supplier negotiations over features and price.

The method engaged previously reticent stakeholders and its rigour instilled confidence in senior management that an objective and thorough evaluation had been conducted. As an adviser, I was comfortable in the knowledge that the decision making process was transparent and auditable.

## Chapter 6: Trawling the marketplace: establishing the longlist

### *An architectural partner's experience of premature shortlisting*

When our business needed to invest in a new CAD system we looked into the options. This involved identifying the market leaders from the architectural press, and management then deciding on the basis of opinions (and prejudices) garnered from other practitioners. In due course, 'the system we selected' left us with some unexpected problems, not least recruitment, and resulted in two offices running different systems during a busy period.

Having later encountered the methodical approach it is clear we could have made a more reasoned judgement that would have, at the least, highlighted the issues we would face. It would also have given management the confidence to consult the technical team more fully.



## Chapter 7: Assessing longlist candidates: selecting the shortlist using the RFI

### *A director's experience of formally measuring fit*

My organisation used this process to select and procure an ERP and PLM system while I was Engineering Director. This was a strategically significant decision for the business because of its purchase price and its criticality to the success of our operations.

The method is powerful because it made us focus on our requirements – enabling us to develop a clear understanding across the user group of what we really needed from our system, and helping us to focus on those in the selection and shortlisting process. In the course of this, we gained insights into the strengths and weaknesses of our own business and we were able to deal confidently and decisively with our prospective suppliers.

The methodical approach quickly gained acceptance within our business because it was coherent, structured and transparent. It had clear milestones and deliverables so that the team, management and sponsors could see progress. It brought specialists, functional managers and operational managers together and enabled them to contribute in a structured and equitable way. It enabled the team to make solid decisions based on visible evidence. The decisions that we made using project deliverables such as price-fit charts were respected.

To make this process work, it is important to allocate a good cross-section of subject matter experts, project staff and a finance rep to the team, and give them the time and space to do their task diligently.

## Chapter 8: Detailed evaluation: assessing the shortlisted candidates

### *A director's experience of delegated evaluation process*

We were at a high-risk crossroads as a business and extremely time-pressed as directors. We needed to replace our single national distributor by creating our own customer database, sales force and logistics, then building up internal functions like customer service, accounts receivable and IT. Lost sales during the handover might never be recovered, because the departing distributor was looking for a competitor brand to maintain their product portfolio.

The business transformation impacted all aspects of our national operation. We needed all-encompassing new software and related hardware within 12 months, but had no experience of selecting off-the-shelf solutions.

By adopting the pre-existing selection method, it made it easier for us to subcontract the management of the selection process. Formally defining the requirements covered many internal business areas and also involved identifying customer and supplier processes. This was especially revealing, as most of the senior management team had worked for the company for at least 15 years. The act of discussing and defining the requirements provided an important insight into current best practice.

*A financial representative on evaluation team's experience*

After realising our four-year-old system had been eclipsed by business growth, we adopted this selection methodology that brought with it the following benefits.

- It had logical evaluation steps that helped the evaluation team better assess their area of responsibility, but also helped them understand how their area interacted and integrated with other related system modules.
- Communication between the selection team members was very efficient as we all had a better understanding of each other's area.
- The evaluation document that was produced at the end of the evaluation process was very exhaustive and, as such, helped enormously when we came to decide on the winner.
- The weighting methodology clearly identified the final contenders and identified the strengths and weaknesses of each solution.
- When reporting back to the Finance team, I found it easier to explain the pros and cons of each system and the benefits that the selected system would bring to our area and to the business as a whole.

## Chapter 9: Scoring: establishing degree of fit and ranking

### *A public sector training manager's experience of sponsoring the selection*

It's a truth in business that worrying about making the wrong decision often leads to inertia. When the decision involves a high value purchase with lots of evidence in the media of how hard it is to make the right choice, it's easy to become completely stalled. Nowhere is this more true than in IT selection. If the NHS, HMRC and MoD waste huge sums on projects that end up being scrapped, what chance have I?

As is often the case, the answer is out there. Find a clearly structured process that allows frequent exit options and take the journey one step at a time.

Some of the key benefits.

- Clearly defined deliverables give the project sponsor the tools to get funding and buy-in for the project.
- Structured workshops ensure staff use their knowledge to build a comprehensive set of requirements.
- Involvement in weighting builds staff understanding of the need for changes or priorities.
- Staff confidence and commitment to the outcome grows as they see the clarity of the process.
- Involving staff builds their understanding of their own business and the potential to do things better.
- Supporting staff to do the maximum amount of the work internally is cost-effective and maintains ownership.
- Understanding what you want, and what you can compromise on, changes the relationship with the vendor out of all recognition.

## Chapter 10: Demonstrations: proving the best fit

### *A US general manager's analysis of the experience*

I have been personally involved in a couple of transitions from organizations with multiple homegrown financial tools to a full-blown enterprise software implementation. This process has many potential mistakes, which can be made during the course of the implementation, some of which can significantly limit the operation of an organization. In my opinion, there are 3 major causes for these types of issues:

1. Business requirements not understood
2. Software selected not able to deliver a system to meet those requirements
3. Organization not committing the proper resources to the implementation of that system.

The cross-functional team approach software selection method with quantitative output, which was utilized, significantly reduces the risk associated with those potential causes. Following these key activities from the methodology will greatly enhance the chance for a successful enterprise software implementation:

1. Defining your needs via interview/workshop
2. 'Possible' requirements definition document as a starting point
3. Compiled and agreed requirements weighting meeting
4. System selection method roadmap briefing for executive staff
5. Compiled and agreed Request For Information document
6. Compiled and agreed longlist / shortlist process.

During this selection process, I was in the unique position of representing a remote office in another country. The overall methodology of this process enabled myself to work as an effective team member primarily remotely, but also able to participate locally during key portions of the project.

## Chapter 11: Reference sites: real customer feedback

### *An entrepreneur's experience of improving research during selection*

I found the method to be logical and straightforward. It gave me guidance in my decision-making and allowed me to choose a solution using my head and not from gut feel.

I had had a previous bad experience with the choice I had made for my website software and content management system. The technology was appropriate but it was other factors such as supplier stability and data security that needed to be considered to ensure my solution was right for my business. The method encouraged me to think about the relative importance of a broad range of requirements – not just the technical features of the solutions on offer.

## Chapter 12: Contracts: negotiation and agreements

### *A director's experience of negotiations based on scored fit*

As project sponsor, I led our negotiation team. The negotiation for our ERP solution was one of the most structured, objective and ultimately successful I have ever conducted.

The methodology highlighted the functionality that was critical to meeting the real needs of the business. This enabled us to easily focus on key areas that were important to us and was a great tool to enable the negotiation to stay focussed.

We engaged in negotiations with two candidates, both of whom provided a very good fit to our requirements. Although not aware of the detail, they were both aware that they were in a close competition, which I felt helped to drive the discussions to a good solution.

### *An implementation manager's experience of contractual safeguards*

The methodology imposes an innovative step at contract agreement stage, as the evaluation scores are formally agreed and accepted by purchaser and vendor. The vendor can challenge the evaluation scores and bid for an improved score subject to provision of reasonable justification. The major benefit is that the agreed final evaluation records become an integral part of the contract. Anyone who has experience of software vendors' contract terms will realise the significant benefit of this commercial innovation.

As evidence of the contractual strength of this approach, I recall a point during project implementation when we were disputing a required time registration process for customer invoicing. The point was quickly won, as we as purchaser were able to point directly to the evaluation record in the contract, where the vendor had clearly stated full compliance. The vendor had to accept the £30,000 costs of the required modification, but more importantly the project avoided the more damaging costs of dispute and associated delay.

It is not unusual for sale specialists dealing with complex technology to be creative in their performance assertions, but this approach means they remain responsible for their statements right through implementation to project sign off.

## Chapter 13: Implementation: preparing the ground

### *An evaluation team member's experience of transferring to implementation*

As the formal system selection process had been very rigorous, it was easier to plan and execute the system implementation. Each member of the selection team understood the available functionality of the chosen system, its complexity and hence the time scale and resources required to implement the system in their respective areas.

We are now in the final stages of the system implementation and we feel that the system selection methodology gave us a lot of confidence in the system and its capability to meet our business needs, both in the immediate and in the long term.

### *A director's experience of two implementations using same approach*

The standard method adopted for the software and hardware selection allowed our newly appointed IT manager and a consultant to work through the requirements definition, long listing, scoring, shortlisting and contract.

A core team represented the transformed business functions and at each checkpoint the selection process was discussed, modified if necessary and then approved by the senior management team and our US parent. Our parent had more functional heads, a more mature IT department and a different sales model. They could therefore intelligently question the UK team's assumptions, so it helped to have a rigorous process behind us.

Many suppliers were keen to be involved with a relatively small company because of the strength of our brand, augmented by a credible evaluation process. The systems were installed in time for the start of the new trading regime with minimal disruption to customers.

As a bonus, the features within the chosen solution also meant that it could potentially be exploited later to support a Pan-European acquisition that increased our presence in France and Benelux. A few years later, we ran a mini-project that built on original project deliverables and followed the now-familiar method against a candidate list of one – the newly installed UK system. Starting with the old requirements, the capture of differences in requirements and the consequent fit-gap analysis gave us clarity. We gained the confidence to extend the exploitation of our UK system to the rest of Europe.



## Chapter 14: Viewpoints by theme

### *An implementation consultant's experience of ownership and culture*

Working with an external consultant, the client's project team had applied the tools and techniques described here to:

- Define the business needs and requirements for a company-wide system
- Qualify vendors and evaluate their product offerings
- Build the business case to justify the proposed investment.

Joining the team at the start of the implementation phase, I was impressed by:

- The quality of the solution chosen, and the supplier's commitment to the implementation process
- The commitment and enthusiasm of the team members – who had been involved in the selection process – and their ownership of the solution.

However, successful implementation is a challenge that should not be underestimated, especially when a key objective is to replace the dysfunctional systems used to control and manage projects, including the business change initiatives.

The role of the project sponsor as a change champion is critical in any successful implementation, as new processes are developed and validated and the organisation recognises the need for behavioural changes – among the managers and 'other ranks'. The temptation to re-introduce familiar but flawed methods of working must also be resisted if the expected business benefits are to be realised. Critical issues during implementation included:

- Continuity of management responsibility through selection and implementation
- A clear vision of the expected business benefits and timescales
- Good communication of the planned changes throughout the organisation
- Recognising and explaining the impact that the new system will have on working practices, and the rules that are embedded in the software. This may be of particular importance when existing informal and flexible systems allow people to avoid basic management disciplines, such as change and version control.

The benefits of a structured approach to system selection were clearly demonstrated by the quality of the selected solution. When system selection is the start of a process of business transformation, the implementation process demands an equally rigorous approach with the full support of senior management.

## Chapter 15: Concluding: recommendations and resources

### *A supplier's experience of contrasting approaches on the same project*

I was recently involved in an opportunity with a customer who had an urgent business need and compelling reason to select an end-to-end solution and it was all systems go to select a system urgently. However, they did not use any selection method initially, and due to the urgency rushed the process by pre-selecting two vendors, provided little information regarding what they were actually looking for and asked for a couple of demonstrations. This resulted in a difficult decision to distinguish between the solutions. To us, the process felt biased towards the other vendor, since communication was poor and meetings were always at short notice with no alternatives. We therefore assumed the other vendor must have been getting more chance to respond favourably as this poor level of engagement did not feel like the company wanted to do business with us. Our approach focused on a strategy to beat the competition, not to address the requirements (especially as these were not clear).

The initial selection process culminated in the Board being unable to make a decision. There were far too many risks. The business users were not bought-in, and the board just saw risk rather than benefit. As vendors, we felt as though we had not been given the chance to demonstrate the true capability of our solution for their business.

The company decided to re-start the selection process, and an external consultant was hired to facilitate the selection process, but also to develop the business processes. A systematic method was then followed to identify the solution capabilities to enable the 'TO BE' process. Requirements were documented and weighted, and the vendors requested to demonstrate against key requirements.

The process was monumentally different from the first time around with information open, two-way communication and a clear basis of decision. We were clear on what we needed to do to demonstrate our capability, and the project team was clear on how to differentiate between vendors.

The selection process did not take any longer than the first time around, but the project benefited from having clear aims and objectives. The opportunity for success with the project is much greater, with all of the project team including the key business users on-board to make it a success.

### *A director's experience of rigorous evaluation that dodged substantial waste*

My role was that of director within a start-up company offering online digital products. Investors had started to become more nervous about lending money to fledgling 'dotcom' start-ups. I had been charged with developing a business plan – outlining in particular the costings for building an IT platform – enabling the business to sell and deliver the majority of its products entirely online.

Whilst starting from scratch with a business can be exciting, there are many unknowns. We had a basic idea of the format our digital products would take and an even more basic idea of how we were going to deliver these. I knew we needed some help in identifying the hardware and software platforms necessary. I'd also read extensively about how most start-ups rushed to build bespoke systems and how disastrous this had proved. It was at this point that I sought specialist advice about procuring off-the-shelf software.

After preliminary discussions, we set to work on putting together a document that would contain a comprehensive list of highly specific requirements. This 'wish list' would be used as the basis for identifying and selecting a short list and ultimately a single software vendor whose product(s) best fit our requirements.

To kick-start the Requirements Definition stage, we began by building on a 'Pizza Base' Requirements Definition Document (RDD). This document contained a wide range of requirements assembled from previous projects and best practice research in our area.

Over the coming sessions we slowly built up the number of requirements through:

- closely examining and refining the business model;
- clarifying our customers' wants and needs;
- identifying areas where the business could differentiate itself from its competitors.

During a number of intensive question and answer sessions, we were able to capture all the requirements deemed important to the success of the project.

The surprising outcome of the requirements definition and vendor selection approach was that the leading edge, 'best fit' software solution, although phenomenally expensive, was fatally flawed. This was only discovered as a result of following the process rigorously and identifying the critical software functionality necessary to support the business model.

This also highlighted a serious problem with the business model, which would mean we would not be able to generate sufficient revenue to justify spending a huge amount on bespoke software. The project was shelved before further time and money were wasted.

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[Martin Tate](#) | [Decision Evaluation Ltd](#)

07885 491197 | [martin.tate@decisionevaluation.co.uk](mailto:martin.tate@decisionevaluation.co.uk)