Fact Finding Techniques

- Background Reading

- Interviewing

- Observation

- Document Sampling

- Questionnaires

Background Reading

- Aim is to understand the organization and its business objectives

- Includes:
  - reports
  - organization charts
  - policy manuals
  - job descriptions
  - documentation of existing systems

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Background Reading

- Advantages:
  - helps to understand the organization before meeting the people who work there
  - helps to prepare for other types of fact finding
  - documentation of existing system may help to identify requirements for functionality of new system

Background Reading

- Disadvantages:
  - written documents may be out of date or not match the way the organization really operates
- Appropriate situations:
  - analyst is not familiar with organization
  - initial stages of fact finding

Interviewing

- Aim is to get an in-depth understanding of the organization's objectives, users' requirements and people's roles

- Includes:
  - managers to understand objectives
  - staff to understand roles and information needs
  - customers and the public as potential users

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Interviewing

- Advantages:
  - personal contact allows the interviewer to respond adaptively to what is said
  - it is possible to probe in greater depth
  - if the interviewee has little or nothing to say, the interview can be terminated

Interviewing

- Disadvantages:
    - can be time-consuming and costly
    - notes must be written up or tapes transcribed after the interview
    - can be subject to bias
    - if interviewees provide conflicting information this can be difficult to resolve later

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Interviewing

- Appropriate situations:
  - most projects
  - at the stage in fact finding when in-depth information is required

- Requires skill to carry out effectively (See Box 6.1 for guidelines)

Observation

- Aim is to see what really happens, not what people say happens
- Includes:
  - seeing how people carry out processes
  - seeing what happens to documents
  - obtaining quantitative data as baseline for improvements provided by new system
  - following a process through end-to-end
- Can be open-ended or based on a schedule

Observation

- Advantages:
  - first-hand experience of how the system operates
  - high level of validity of the data can be achieved
  - verifies information from other sources
  - allows the collection of baseline data

Observation

- **Disadvantages:**
  - people don't like being observed and may behave differently, distorting the findings
  - requires training and skill
  - logistical problems for the analyst with staff who work shifts or travel long distances
  - ethical problems with personal data

Observation

- Appropriate situations:
  - when quantitative data is required
  - to verify information from other sources
  - when conflicting information from other sources needs to be resolved
  - when a process needs to be understood from start to finish

Document Sampling

- Aims to find out the information requirements that people have in the current system
- Also aims to provide statistical data about volumes of transactions and patterns of activity
- Includes:
  - obtaining copies of empty and completed documents
  - counting numbers of forms filled in and lines on the forms
  - screenshots of existing computer systems

Document Sampling

- Advantages:
  - good for gathering quantitative data
  - good for finding out about error rates
- Disadvantages:
  - not helpful if the system is going to change dramatically
- Appropriate situations:
  - always used to understand information needs
  - where large volumes of data are processed
  - where error rates are high

Questionnaires

- Aims to obtain the views of a large number of people in a way that can be analysed statistically

- Includes:
  - postal, web-based and email questionnaires
  - open-ended and closed questions
  - gathering opinion as well as facts

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YES/NO Questions

Do you print reports from the existing system?   YES   NO   10

(Please circle the appropriate answer.)

Multiple Choice Questions

How many new clients do you obtain in a year?   a) 1–10 ☐   11

(Please tick one box only.)   b) 11–20 ☐

                                           c) 21–30 ☐

                                           d) 31 + ☐

Scaled Questions

How satisfied are you with the response time of the stock update?

(Please circle one option.)

1. Very   2. Satisfied   3. Dissatisfied   4.Very   12

   satisfied   dissatisfied

Open-ended Questions

What additional reports would you require from the system?

_____

_____

_____

Questionnaires

- Advantages:
  - economical way of gathering information from a large number of people
  - effective way of gathering information from people who are geographically dispersed
  - a well designed questionnaire can be analysed by computer

Questionnaires

- Disadvantages:
  - good questionnaires are difficult to design
  - no automatic way of following up or probing more deeply
  - postal questionnaires suffer from low response rates

Questionnaires

- Appropriate situations:
  - when views of large numbers of people need to be obtained
  - when staff of organization are geographically dispersed
  - for systems that will be used by the general public and a profile of the users is required

Questionnaires

- Require skill to design effectively (See Box 6.2 for guidelines)

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