

PROJECT INITIATION

The two chapters in this section address the activities that take place before analysis of a specific project begins. Project initiation can take place in several different ways. First, it can be part of a larger enterprise reengineering effort. Second, a project might be initiated as part of an information systems planning effort. Third, a project might be initiated based on a user request for a specific project. All three methods of project initiation are equally feasible and equally useful in beginning an application development project.

Chapter 5 addresses the first two project initiation efforts. The main discussion is how to do a reengineering design of an organization and plan applications and technologies to support the redesign. Enterprise level planning, such as an information systems plan, is described as a subset of activities that focus on applications only and are an abbreviated reengineering study. Most researchers and industry experts, such as James Martin, recommend that at least an information systems plan (ISP) is a worthwhile planning activity in existing organizations. Both reengineering and ISPs result in plans for multiple applications which are prioritized for development.

Enterprise level planning exercises are costly, and some companies cannot afford to spend computer resources on such studies. In these companies, application development projects are initiated via a direct request from a user. Also, companies that do enterprise level plans might desire to reconfirm recommendations that might be two or three years old. For direct initiation and for reconfirmation of recommendations, a user memo to the Information Systems Manager or to an IS Steering Committee can initiate project assessment. Such an assessment is called a *feasibility study*.

Chapter 6 details the activities involved in a feasibility study. A feasibility study is performed to assess the financial, technological, and organizational readiness of the company for the application. Feasibility is an important analysis that is usually conducted on individual application projects rather than on a whole group of applications, such as might be identified in an ISP or organizational reengineering project. The feasibility analysis determines the extent to which new technologies, skills, or training are required by the user and developer staffs and assesses the ability of the company to pay for the development project.

Part of the technical feasibility is to define a direction for the application development through an evaluation of technical development alternatives. For instance, an application might be on-line or real-time; it might be on a standalone PC, on a PC connected to a local area network, or on terminals attached to a mainframe; it might use a 4GL database software such as Oracle™ or a full-service database such as IMS DB/DC.¹ Likely alternatives are evaluated to determine the extent to which functional requirements would be supported, and to determine any alternative-specific benefits that might be present. A recommendation for technical

concepts is made and may (or may not) be accepted at the completion of the feasibility study. Even though the concept need not be cast in concrete at this time, it helps to have a sense of the operational environment for conducting the analysis phase of the project.

A risk assessment should be performed as part of feasibility analysis. The risk assessment identifies technical, personnel, and financial problems that could hinder the successful completion of the project. For each risk defined, two types of plans are developed. First, a contingency plan to deal with the problem if it should occur is defined. Second, immediate steps to minimize the probability of the risk's occurrence are planned and taken.

¹ Oracle™ is a trademark of the Oracle Corporation. IMS DB/DC is a product of IBM Corporation.