Item 2 of Paul Rich's letter "IT Concurrence Meeting" dated 9 February   28/02/96Page 4

Interfaces between POCL systems and PFI Service via TMS

Implication 6: "Additional interfaces will be required unless our requirements are cleared before the ITT is issued. These will become expensive"

Response: POCL ADT (S.Woolley) and ISSU (C Hooper) have considered the interfaces at length, agreed the requirements and provided and agreed the supporting document;

It is unlikely that all the interfaces that may be required during the life of the contract could be sensibly specified, and addition of interfaces should always feature as part of the cost of amending or taking on products.

Implication 7: "The Business Case Benefits of TIP and Distribution (and therefore their design) are dependent upon the right interfaces being in place from TMS. These are being jeopardised"

Response: These business cases are not a programme issue.

The programme has passed onto service providers the requirements for the TIP and Distribution system Interfaces as provided to the programme by the relevant teams.

The programme is constrained by the data supplied t it, as to the data it can supply the service provider as requirements.

Implication 8: "The IS Strategy will be compromised if the appropriate information / interfaces are not available"

Response: These are addressed in the previous two responses.

"IBM Visit - Strategic Concurrence" - January 29, 1996

It is believed that many of the issues raised in this memorandum were addressed in the second meeting that took place with IBM.

Issue 9: "The StorePlace solution being offered does not use a database. All counter transactions are written to a 'flat file' log."

Response: This was raised as a C5 risk (due to difficulty in attributing costs) early in the demonstrator phase, and was reflected in the relevant value factor scores.

Though IBM are not using a database, their solution does satisfy our requirements.

Item 2 of Paul Rich's letter "IT Concurrence Meeting" dated 9 February   28/02/96Page 5

Issue 10:   "IBM are proposing to implement a special 'token management' application for receipting Benefit Cards at the Counter.

This application will be under the Benefits Agency control and specification (??? on our counters) directly into PAS, and bypassing the Generic capability which we would like to see"

Response: IBM are implementing the management of Benefit cards as an external 'track and trace' system, since StorePlace, being a retail package, does not contain a complex token management capability.

The card management portion of the overall solution can be split off for all the service providers if they so desired.

Issue 11:   "IBM have not demonstrated that they fully appreciate the concept of generic transactions, as applied to the Post Office.

They need to demonstrate more convincingly that their concept of generic transactions will support us into the future"

Response: IBM have the concept of parameterised and sub-classed generic transactions, this issue was addressed in the subsequent visit to IBM.

"Pathway Visit - Strategic Concurrence" - January 22, 1996

Implication 12: "Pathway have a view of the way in which day-to-day Post Office operations will be run which I believe is different from the view of the POCL, particularly in the area of Cash Accounting and related Processes, and the Role of reconciliation and TIP.

This needs to be checked out by Dave Smith and Peter Dent ASAP

They have a structured system which might be very difficult to change"

Response: Pathways understanding is in line with current POCL practice and as defined in the functional requirements by POCL.

Issue 13:   "They do not support the concept of the '5 generics'."

Response: This has been recognised by the programme, and is reflected as a C5 risk, with corresponding marking against the appropriate value factors.

Implication 14: "They have not adopted a standard 'Retail Front End', and therefore they need to spend considerable time and effort doing this. I am not certain that within the time constraints of the Programme, that they can develop all the best demonstrated retail controls that we would expect to see in a fully rolled out system. (Retail specialists have spent many years developing these controls !!) (e.g. They cannot yet demonstrate the concept of a Customer Session working

Item 2 of Paul Rich's letter "IT Concurrence Meeting" dated 9 February   '8 02 96Page 6
      properly - where they have tried to pilot it, a customer cannot do more than ?
      transactions - many more examples are available).

      They talk about, and can describe some of the processes and controls, but they
      have not demonstrated that they really understand the amount of effort involved
      in delivering them."

Response: This has been recognised by the programme, with corresponding marking
      against the appropriate value factors.

Implication 15: *"Their system is a 'closed' design.*: The Pathway solution is based around an
      innovative messaging technology. As long as the system is 'closed' then this
      technology may (yet to be proven) work effectively. However as soon as you
      need to communicate with systems that do not use the messaging technology,
      you have to write a *software agent*.

      These Software Agents can be very cumbersome, need to be written for every
      external interface (e.g. Moving data to TIP, Interface with Bill Payment Clients
      (each needing his own agent). Distribution etc. etc.).

      There are very few (if any) Software Agents currently written, and we could not
      specify all of them in advance of the ITT, as each new product/customer to the
      system may need one, and we will probably be asked to pay an appropriate price
      for additional Software Agents. !!!"

Response: Pathway's solution does indeed require the creation of software agents to handle
      the interfaces to external systems, however these agents are equivalent to
      interface modules that would need to be written in the other two systems (and
      any other similar offerings) to handle any specific data processing, file
      formatting and communications protocols for the transfer to the clients.

      The term "software agent" is a feature of the particular style adopted by the
      academics within Escher; the term process or module might be equally
      appropriate. The agent is a program which uses the published Riposte 32 API to
      extract data (in the form of messages) from the Riposte Message Store, and
      processes it according to business requirements - for our clients, this would
      mean formatting it to their particular needs and transferring it to them.

      The Riposte API includes calls to enable both "on line" and "batch" agents to be
      written; indeed, the An Post Savings Bank transaction witnessed in Dublin uses
      just an agent using the API to handle on-line withdrawal and deposit
      transactions performed at the counter. The agent "listens" for the specific
      transaction type, and forwards the authorisation request onto the Savings Bank
      computer (an existing mainframe application) in real time; it then passes the
      response from the mainframe back to Riposte (across the API) and down to the
      requesting terminal.

      An agent can handle transactions for more than one client; indeed, it would be
      possible to pass all transactions of a particular generic type though the same
      agent. As with any of the solutions, however, it is likely there would have to be

Item 2 of Paul Rich's letter "IT Concurrence Meeting" dated 9 February.   28 02 96 Page 7

some small amount of client-specific processing to meet client specific interface requirements (this may be less likely if all transactions are eventually forwarded through TIP, as the client-specifics would them be moved to TIP which would have to have a "software agent" interface module per client type).

The agent concept imposes a particularly modular design, the underlying message replication functions of Riposte are kept totally generic within the boundary of the API, whilst the specific business logic required for particular transactions is isolated into a specific software agent.

Although further agents will undoubtedly need to be written as our requirements for new products become known, we would expect that the majority of new transaction types would be based on existing agents, with only minor modifications to implement product specific business logic. If a radically different transaction was introduced, it is likely that this would indeed need a substantially new agent, but this is little different from the other offerings, where new code would also be needed.

In terms of "additional price", this is a contractual issue that will need to be extracted from all service providers in terms of time and money required to effect changes.

Implication 16: "A detailed examination of the systems transactions files has raised significant doubts whether their solution can actually support the authorisation reconciliation requirements of TIP without a major change in design - this needs to be confirmed by the Programme"

Response.   A detailed transaction log was produced by Pathway some days following the demonstration; this supported the transactions that were performed. The transaction log is written in "attribute grammar" and not easily interpreted. It must be remembered that the demonstration was performed on a version of Riposte that is being adapted from the Irish system and has not yet been extended to accommodate the POCL specific functionality. We never expected that suppliers would physically demonstrate a fully working solution at this stage.

I trust that this clarifies the position, and shows that Basil's findings were in agreement with the programs.

GRO

Bob King
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BA/POCL Programme

CC: John Meagher, Tom Patterson, Jeremy Folkes