

KISH P & I LOSS PREVENTION CIRCULAR KPI-LP-53-2012 ***(Ten pieces of Advice for Managers on Utilizing Soft-wares)***

➤ **Introduction:**

In a shipping company likewise any other institution there are possibilities to make use of various soft-wares in order to make the jobs easier; extract required reports & statistics and implement related management and supervision systems. In doing so there are some problems observed. This circular looks into different viewpoints and possible measures in order to adapt the best practical approach.

➤ **1-Choosing a Soft-ware:**

It is usually the practice that middle-level managers are asked to find the best available soft-ware in the market for the purpose you are interested in. This "Best" has many versions; most managers like it to be not-expensive. Usually the cheap ones have many flaws that the users are very much bothered by. The advice is to try to include the end-users along with middle & top level managers in deciding upon the choices available. The result is not always an expensive version; you would most probably reach an optimum option. Like any other management system element; the managers should involve all levels of staff in decisions, especially those which are going to affect daily operations & matters like soft-ware utilization.

➤ **2- Incorrect perception of soft-wares:**

People get used fast to the things they like but often do have resistance to something new, especially if it primarily affects their daily work and it requires re-programming the mind to think and act differently. Resistance is one of the things managers face when introducing (enforcing) new tools in the company. Another issue is the perception if they have been working solely with MS Excel, Access or similar Microsoft based databases, you would expect any other software to function the same way as an excel sheet. The soft-wares are usually easier, user-friendlier & more task-oriented than the general databases. They may not seem so at first but the users should be advised to have patience & give some time to settle. This can be made easier by performing introduction sessions & advertising the stronger abilities of the new programmes.

➤ **3- Developing own platform:**

There is nothing wrong with decision to develop own system for the company and internal use. But before

proceeding with this, it is advisable to answer following questions:

1. Will you have enough money, time and resources to pay 100% attention to follow development cycle considering that everyone is so busy with daily routine tasks?
2. Will you have enough funds to apply further amendments to the system and pay for ongoing maintenance and support?
3. Consider employee rotation in company. What would happen if those key people who know the software inside out leave the company after 2-5 years, do you have anybody transferring their knowledge further?
4. Building anything from the scratch even professionals working in the IT industry for years have failures. Especially if it is your first project, be ready to fail while making an excellent product based on specifications but not really working in the real life. Can you afford to rebuild it afterwards?

➤ **4- Strangely focused management requirement:**

Top to Bottom planning is all right if you want to achieve strategic objectives within the company and this is primarily related to long term milestones. Can it be applied when choosing soft-wares? The answer is usually no. There are reasons for preferring bottom to up planning. This is especially important for maritime companies with 20 employees and above.

1. Nearly 80% of all work bringing revenues is done by lowest or middle level employees, thus they are your most important asset; involve them heavily in the selection process as the software must primary ease their daily job;
2. Reporting is important for senior level when making strategic decisions. Such decisions are not made on daily basis, so reporting can not be considered as primary requirement. You can ask ad-hoc report from the vendor at any time when actually you need it. Think better on how your employees can operate with the system easily, get information from the system and feed data fast and concentrate on other tasks to bring more revenues for the company.
3. Again, involve lowest and middle level employees – they will provide you most valuable feedback, they will appreciate it and

overall motivation within the company will grow. There will be no need to enforce the software or convince the team, it will come in naturally. Make it as teamwork and ensure there is one responsible on top of the team.

him/her, thinking that eventually he/she might lose the job in the future;

4. Consult and take IT department opinion in consideration, but do not make your final decision primarily relying on it.

➤ **5- Shorten the list of requirements:**

The larger you will have requirements list the bigger problems you will face getting everything together; ending up lost and far away from your primary goal. It is better to stick to the core requirements that trying to trim bits and pieces.

6-Inappropriate testing:

Is the first impression right or wrong? Neither is the answer for the software as it might look good but functioning terribly and vice versa. Normally for first software insights you would ask for presentation to understand how the system works. Afterwards you may want to have a demo and try it yourself. Ok, sounds good, but does not prove anything as it is only clicking around the various modules based on which right decision can not be made. Here is what should be done: get the system set-up for you for 1-3 months, use it completely for one pilot vessel/set of tasks, gather feedback from people involved in the testing and make your final decision on further cooperation with the vendor or wait so you can try another one. Your patience and dedication will reward you in the long term.

➤ **7- Get the software when available & suitable:**

If you have not yet found the software that would suite your needs, leave it for a while. Either you are not ready or market is not ready for your requirements. Getting a useless one will only waste time & resources.

➤ **8- Involvement of IT department in the process:**

Many companies do have internal IT department or use outsourced IT services to set-up printers, manage internal networks, install computers and solve the user based issues occurring from time to time. To decide for involving the IT people in the selection, you should consider the following points:

1. IT Admin is not a programmer nevertheless he/she might be educated to the level understanding the basics or beyond the basics;
2. IT manager does not work with ship or other management on daily basis;
3. If you have single IT Admin within the company, a soft-ware may mean fear for

➤ **9- All features wanted:**

Having everything and right now is perfect combination which is never achievable. Whatever software a manager might choose, it might be lacking something, for example, some special reporting or minor feature such as integrated e-mail functionality. And in most of the cases some minor feature is probably good to have and you long for it. Yet again if you see your expectations list has grown into the project, make another list of "must-have-functionality", prioritize and find most applicable vendor which is also able to provide tailored functionality afterwards.

➤ **10- Service continuation & support:**

If you are getting a soft-ware as a database tool, paying for it once and having no further relation to the vendor; ask yourself, would you expect that such company still exist after few years or not. As technology develops, you will be unable to ask any software enhancements from the vendor which disappears. It is much safer to choose vendors which charge you tiny monthly fee or annual licence fee for full package service.

Signing up for support services is a very good practice so that the future changes can be coped up & there will be no need to do all the process over again ; thus losing time & money. Even if there will be a whole new soft-ware introduced in the future; it is much better to get it done by elder service providers with lots of similarities than a completely different system anew.