

Implementing SuperOffice at Mover Incorporated¹

Harald Jurgensen, the CEO of Mover Incorporated at the Hong Kong office, had brought up in one of the monthly meetings of the top management the success of Whiteline (a sister company of Mover's) with the use of SuperOffice (a customer relationship software; description of SuperOffice is given in Exhibit 1), in maintaining and providing access to comprehensive customer databases from all over the world. Harald had said that the VP marketing of Whiteline had mentioned to him "the use of SuperOffice had enhanced the productivity of his people by at least 15 percent."

Mover Incorporated was a multi-location organization involved in providing logistic services to large clients. Mover's was a fully owned subsidiary of a large manufacturing company with its head quarters in Copenhagen, Denmark. The parent company was 150 years old in its operations. Mover's was formed in 1990 to meet a growing demand for one stop logistic needs of large manufacturers. The choice of locating their headquarter as Hong Kong was seen as strategic because it kept them closer to countries that were perceived as 'rising giants' in world trade. In addition to the headquarter in Hong Kong there were full fledged, large operations of Mover's based in Manila, Philippines, Copenhagen, Denmark, and Austin, USA. They often dealt with customers who operated from multiple locations and had large volumes to be transported to different parts of the world. It was the corporate strategy to have a base of customers with large turnovers and multiple products. Though there were only a few competitors of Mover's size and capability there was cognizable competition from small players in the unorganized sector who had fewer overhead costs and were able to provide personalized service on account of being closer to the customer. However, many in the unorganized sector were unable to handle complexity of operations and thus were likely to provide poorer quality. Thus it was essential for Mover's to compete on quality, ability to handle complexity, and provide services in the long term.

Gina, Maakon, Ahmed, and Kurt, all senior officers in Mover's at the Hong Kong office, present at the meeting had jumped to Harald's idea of implementing centralized customer relationship software. Kurt had shared on several occasion the embarrassments some members of his marketing team had faced when customers seemed to be ahead of the marketing team. For example, in one instance a representative of the Mover's team in Hong Kong approached a prospective customer in Sweden with a proposal for providing certain services. The customer mentioned that their New York office had already been approached by the Mover's Austin office and they were already discussing the details. The man from the Hong Kong office was embarrassed and unable to justify his trip to the customer. In another instance when Jim of the Austin office went to negotiate a deal with a client in New York, even before he could bring some numbers up the client said that their Buenos Aires office had faxed some of the quotations the Mover's Hong Kong office had sent to them. Kurt had shared, that Jim had to somehow sneak a look at the fax and adjust his own numbers accordingly. The negotiation had not proceeded very

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smoothly because of inadequate preparation on Jim's part. In both the above cases the representatives of Mover's were less informed than the customer. With customers and Mover's offices spread all over the world such occurrences happened often enough to start causing worry and a proposal to implement customer relationship management software was welcome.

A decision was made to install a customer relationship management software and train marketing executives at those locations of Mover's involved in international marketing. The top management team asked Ahmed Abraham, the Vice President of business development to look into the feasibility, cost of the software and hardware, and the implementation of a customer relations software in all Mover's and related offices supporting the marketing function. Ahmed's team carried out an evaluation of the type of software, whether 'tailor made' or 'off the shelf'. A decision was reached that the 'off-the-shelf' software namely SuperOffice, already in use by the Sister Company, Whiteline, was suitable and was to be used. Ahmed's team had found out that the cost of unlimited license for Super Office was a 1000 USD. However, the costs of installing servers at the Hong Kong office would be approximately 200,000 USD. The top management team decided that this would be an investment worth the cost and decided to go forward.

On 17th July 2000, the Terms of Reference for the implementation of Super Office across all Mover International Business Units were finalized after considerable deliberation by the top management team. Ahmed Abraham along with the top management formed a steering committee consisting of Harald Jurgensen, Maakon Halan, and Jensen all from the Mover's Hong Kong office. The steering committee made the decision to include Mover's Hong Kong, Mover's Copenhagen, Mover's Austin, and Mover's Philippines in the scope of the project. The decision was based on the extent to which information sharing from each of these offices was necessary for improving international marketing. In addition it was also decided to include other sister companies of Mover Incorporated namely, Mover IT, Mover Management Services, and Mover's Transport System all with head quarters in Hong Kong in the implementation of the SuperOffice because information from them was often used in drawing up the marketing plans.

The head of each identified office, that was to be included in the implementation of Super Office, was sent an email describing the new project asking him/her to nominate one person with whom Huang Lee, the project manager incharge of implementation, could correspond during the implementation of the project. This email was sent by Harald Jurgensen the chief executive at the Hong Kong office and the head of the steering committee to impress upon each office the importance of the use of SuperOffice. In several cases the heads of offices nominated themselves to be the point of contact. In others they identified another person in their office. The human resource structure that evolved out of deliberations for the SuperOffice project is shown in Exhibit 2.

The steering committee identified five stages in which the project was to be implemented.

Stage 1: installing a full-fledged trial version of SuperOffice valid for 30 days

Stage 2: customize the SuperOffice by determining Mover's dataset.

Stage 3: finalization of the Database Design

Stage 4: deciding on the mechanism for linking with all users

Stage 5: testing phase and trial run.

Stage 1 comprised of installing a full-fledged trial version of SuperOffice valid for 30 days on each of the project members PC. This was done to enable familiarization of all members with the operation and capabilities of Super Office. A program CD was mailed to all members and they were asked to install it themselves on their computers. However, before sending the CD Huang and his colleague spent up to four months of full time work effort (that is two months each) in designing a manual for quick reference and help with the use of Super Office partly because the manual that came with Super Office was found to be inadequate. The document was comprehensive and occupied more than 1 Megabyte of space. It was 40 pages long with many pictures in it. Each project manager was emailed the document and asked to download and take printouts of the document for easy reference. Several e-mails were sent to project members to try out the product and send queries or suggestions for use.

Huang received very few (upto 5) emails at the end of the 30 day period about the manual or use of the Super Office. In most cases it was simply acknowledgement of receipt of the CD and the manual by email.

However, the top team was not disappointed and decided to go ahead to the second stage, which was the determining of Mover's dataset. To customize the SuperOffice for their own requirements all project members were asked to send requirements about the information that they wanted the SuperOffice database to capture. This was to be done with reference to their trial of SuperOffice. Huang received several emails that basically looked like wish lists. Majority of them had not used Super Office as the reference point. Huang then wrote back to them saying that some of the things they wanted could not be done and others were already present in Super Office; did they want it changed in someway or leave it as is? The number of replies petered out at this stage. Huang even received three to four emails saying that Super Office was really not suited to their requirements.

Huang and Ahmed examined the other emails and realized that almost all that the users had wanted was possible to provide in Super Office. Ahmed told Huang "that he need not have pressed people for providing a list with reference to the use of Super Office". It was assumed that the source of negativity in the two or three mails may have been a result of the pressure for sending comments. It was assumed that people were busy and would be more willing to use the finished product. The matter was also discussed with the project facilitator, Gina Boris, and she also felt that they should not expect too much from the users and could go ahead and make changes as they deemed fit.

Thus, as planned the project moved on to the third stage- database design. Based on the responses, his own understanding of business, and capabilities of SuperOffice Huang created an ideal dataset for recording details of meetings of a marketing manager.

Huang sent the same to all project members and asked them to start using the dataset and send comments based on their use. As had become a pattern even several weeks later Huang sent several group emails and received very few comments. The silence was attributed to lack of use and thus it was decided to move on to Stage 4 to make the product ready to use from remote locations.

Stage 4 was the linking with all Mover's business units. Decisions had to be made about the technical implementations and administrative procedures of SuperOffice. Xiao Chan of Mover IT in Hong Kong was asked to carry out a study on the possible options. Xiao presented two options to best suit the requirements of the Mover Office: 1) SuperOffice 4.5 with SuperOffice for Internet and 2) SuperOffice 4.5 with SuperOffice Satellite and Area Management. The first option would allow users to access all functionality of the Super Office through Web pages from the Internet/Intranet. All information would reside in a central database and could be accessed by a web server. The user would only need a web browser and a connection to the internet to access the required information. This option would allow access from anywhere in the world, or from any terminal connected to the corporate Wide Area Network (WAN), Wilnet, within the group. It was felt that it would greatly increase mobility of users and would allow full realization of centralized database architecture. The second option was to use distributed database architecture. Each office would have its own database replicated from the central database. The replication process would be scheduled at a non-peak period to avoid slowing down of WAN because of higher bandwidth utilization of WAN at peak times. Users in this system could access the information through the SuperOffice application installed into their workstation and mobile users could replicate a portion of the database on their laptops depending on their requirements. This option would reduce the response time for remote office to access the information, as the database would be local. However, it was felt that this would increase inconsistency and redundancy in the information, as modifications to central/remote database would not be immediate. It was also presented that the structure of the administrative authority would be similar regardless of the option selected. A chief administrator would be appointed at the central site for both technical and system administration. He/she would have the highest authority to the entire system.

After considerable debate the option of SuperOffice 4.5 with SuperOffice for Internet was chosen. The following advantages of the chosen option over Option 2 helped make the decision: a) the rate of deployment would be higher and cost of deployment, implementation and maintenance would be lower; b) there would be fewer inconsistencies and redundancy in information available to users; c) the administration would be more efficient; and d) it would be possible to have greater controls over security in the internet version.

After all the hardware was put in place the fifth and final phase, that is, the testing phase and trial run began. All members were supposed to enter the data after their visit using internet/intranet depending on their location at the time of entering the information. If they were on a long tour then the expectation was that they would access Super Office from the Mover's web page and fill in the necessary details. In other cases when they were in their office they could simply use the Wilnet. Retrieval of information stored by others was similarly possible both from office and remote locations. At this stage several members did start using the database. However, people found it time consuming and sometimes impossible to use because of poor connectivity in some of the client cities.

At the end of two months an assessment was made of the use of SuperOffice by the Gina Boris, the project facilitator. It was found that the use was really quite limited. It was thus decided that a training program for its use would be organized for all users in Hong Kong. It was felt that it would not only increase the skill level but also convey the

importance of its use. However, while dates were being discussed for the training program it was found that the real users of SuperOffice were secretaries. It was common practice for the person who went on a marketing trip to come and hand over the details of the visit to his/her secretary who would then input the details into the SuperOffice. Thus, it was decided that a training program would be designed to train secretaries in the use of SuperOffice. Owing to the high costs of face-to-face training, a decision was made to opt for online training. Attempts were made to encourage the use of SuperOffice by sending a self administered training module to secretaries and asking the project manager incharge in the respective offices to make time available for the secretaries to learn the use of SuperOffice. Huang sent this email as well and as usual did not receive many replies. In the meantime, Ahmed had given Huang new responsibilities and he moved on to those and stopped sending emails about SuperOffice.

In May 2002, when Gina was reviewing many of her projects in the past two years she was dismayed to find that SuperOffice was just not being used. She spoke to several possible users about it and was puzzled by the responses- they were animated and carried resentment.

Sheila, the person incharge in the Hong Kong said, "I may have done ten to twelve entries in the entire time period. It was just not workable". Her boss, who was VP Marketing for that office, added, "it was too bulky, non user friendly, and unnecessary." He also added "just because Whiteline found it useful, I cannot see why we should have adopted it as well".

Another comment that she heard was, "how could you expect me to go into a cybercafe in Buenos Aires to input data about my meeting with a client. I should have been able to do it in my room and then send it across with the least difficulty."

When asked how involved did you feel in the implementation of Super Office? A person in the office in Copenhagen said, "Not at all, I did what I was told to. Once I did something exactly as I was asked, and then they told us to delete all that, which I did; but did not do much with SuperOffice thereafter". He added, "I really do not use and did not use SuperOffice, you know."

Another member situated in Philippines said, "I never understood why we spent so much time and money on Super Office, I could do the same things using Lotus notes or Netscape Mail. The issue was about sharing information and understanding the importance of it. That was really never addressed."

Gina was still not sure why SuperOffice had died unnoticed in the Mover group. She was also unsure if the steering committee had even noticed the disuse of SuperOffice!

Exhibit 1

Details about utility of SuperOffice from its website



SuperOffice.

'What is SuperOffice CRM (Customer Relationship Mgt)5?

SuperOffice CRM 5 frees up time by simplifying tasks such as searching for external contact information. Vital information about the customers, prospects and suppliers is consolidated in one easy accessible place. In an instant address details, contact histories, letters, faxes and e mail can be recalled. SuperOffice was the first company to see the value of a customer-centric follow-up system. It is designed on the principal of maintaining sound relations with external contacts as the be-all-end-all in any company's success.

(from www.programmingpoole.com/products_superoffice.html).

The official website of SuperOffice claims that "'Power through simplicity' has always been the essence of the SuperOffice philosophy. We believe that effective Customer Relationship Management is an essential component in ensuring that the entire organization remains customer-focused. SuperOffice offers an effective tool for maintaining a picture of the ever-growing volume of information that companies are forced to process. It helps us to maintain an optimal picture of the organization's customers and contacts- together".

(from www.superoffice.com)

What does it do?

The software allows you to keep track of all interactions, giving a comprehensive overview of all contact-related information. Also it links your people and your company's customers, prospects and suppliers.

It provides all the relevant information at your fingertips, no matter who has previously dealt with a company or contact and bridges the gaps between departments and business areas. For example, Diary features, involves managing employees time better.

(from www.programmingpoole.com/products_superoffice.html)

Exhibit 2

Human resource structure for implementation of SuperOffice

