

APMG EVALUATION SERVICE FOR PROJECT MANAGEMENT PRODUCTS

SILVER REPORT

Company:

The Mundane Software Company Ltd.

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Product:

Simply Project Office Version 1

This report covers the Silver Stage assessment of Simply Project Office Version 1, a suite of applications from The Mundane Software Company Ltd., that I conducted between Thursday, 15 September and Tuesday, 20 September 2005.

Simply Project Office is a set of Web-based tools designed to enable users to perform a range of tasks, normally carried out within a project office, as intuitively as possible and with the minimum of training. There are a number of modules still at the planning stage, or in the process of being constructed. However, this report is only concerned with those modules that were actually available to customers on the dates of the assessment. These are: Change Master, Fault Master, Issue Master, Meeting Master, Programme Master, Quality Master, Risk Master, Job Master and Organisation Master.

Change Master

Changes are logged, prioritised and made available for authorisation. The use of change boards and rapid approval is facilitated. An action plan to put a change into effect can be constructed and monitored. Outstanding action lists can be produced and changes can have costed assessments which are chased if they become overdue. A full history of accepted and rejected changes is kept and summary and detail reports can be produced.

Fault Master

This module enables tracking of progress towards the resolution of faults. The project manager is also given a number of ways to analyse the project to determine its state of health. The system's fault types and analysis codes are user-defined, so that any project component fault can be tracked, not just software. A fault priority level controls the number of days available to fix it and comments can be added to the record.

Issue Master

Issues are analysed by priority and type and these parameters can be user-defined. Once entered, details of an issue are editable. An action plan to deal with the issue can be created and monitored. Project managers and administrators can access a metrics report that lists all issues, their status and their priority. Summary and detail reports are also available. All reports are produced in PDF format. Issues can be transferred to risks and vice-versa.

Meeting Master

Used to prepare and circulate the agenda, minutes and action plans for each meeting in a regular series of similar meetings. Minutes are recorded as meeting points. Where actions are involved, these are appended to the meeting points. There are three types of people on the circulation list - attendees, copied and informed. Actions can't be assigned to someone missing from the circulation list. An overdue actions report can be produced and email reminders sent automatically.

Programme Master

This tool allows programme managers to create summarised views of their projects. It identifies the projects in a particular programme, and which issues and risks need monitoring at programme level. A range of reports that collate data from the other modules and present it from the programme perspective is available.

Quality Master

This module enables quality assurance and quality control records to be kept and will therefore be of particular interest to those who use PRINCE2 or another accepted methodology where regular quality reviews form part of the project process. Incorporating user-defined document types, review roles and review types, it notifies reviewers that they have been selected and also highlights incomplete reviews, prompts for late returns and reports on overdue reviews.

Risk Master

Risks can be analysed by likelihood, severity, type and impact and a disposition strategy can be decided upon. A plan can be created to deal with the risk. When an action is assigned to an individual, they are sent an email advising them of the fact. Actions have 'due' dates and the person dealing with an action can be sent an email message if no action is recorded by then. Similar reports are available in both the risks and issues modules.

Job Master

Job Master allows individuals to record their own time, and (if authorised) time for other people, and pass it on for appropriate authorisation. Only unauthorised timesheets may be amended but, once a timesheet has been authorised, one may add a new line to it and re-submit it. Timesheets can't be printed until they've been submitted. People can be permitted to authorise time either at project or personal level. The authoriser is only able to see the summary information about the timesheet line being authorised. Emails can be sent to chase for unsubmitted timesheets.

Organisation Master

Where a parameter is specific to an application, it's maintained within that application. However, to manage the functions that affect the entire system, the administrator uses Organisation Master. It's used to assign security rights to users, enter and edit project details and maintain the user-definable areas of the system. Function names may be changed and the text of advisory emails issued by the system can be edited. Cost tables can be edited, as can items in look-up tables used by the system.

I have already established, during the course of preparing the Bronze Assessment report on Simply Project Office, that its design and use fall within the field of guidance offered by the OGC Business Change Guidance documents covering Project Management, Programme

Management and Risk Management. I now confirm that opinion and am able to state that using Simply Project Office in the way that it has been designed to operate will help users to comply with the appropriate guidelines.

The Mundane Software Company states that their product >supports methodologies such as PRINCE2'. Whilst Simply Project Office has not been specifically designed as a PRINCE2 tool, Change Master, Fault Master, Issue Master, Risk Master and Quality Master all provide support to those following this methodology. However, in a few instances, the required information is not directly available within the application, although it is available via an indirect source. The Mundane Software Company has published tables illustrating the extent of the support provided by their products and these are available at www.mundanesoftware.co.uk/uk/site.htm

The printed publicity material submitted with this application consisted of a copy of a sales brochure. Other pre-sales publicity material submitted, in electronic format, consisted of a PowerPoint presentation.

I have studied each of these documents. In the sales brochure I found no claims that I was unable to substantiate had been made.

In the PowerPoint presentation I found the statements: 'consolidation of data is simple', 'easy to use', 'a simple to use interface', and 'easy to use, consistent user interface'. I agree with each of these statements in the context in which it is used. However, because of the nature of these statements, the veracity of which depends on the ability of the user, I was unable to fully substantiate them. I am of the opinion that they are all essentially advertising 'puff' and, as such, are unlikely to mislead any potential purchaser of the product.

In the PowerPoint presentation, I also found four slides illustrating a Pie chart that, by inference, claimed that Simply Project Office could provide 60% of a project's software requirements. Mundane Software informed me that it had never intended that this inference to be drawn when designing the slides. However, the company has now replaced these four slides with slides using Venn charts that present the same idea without any proportional inference. I think these are more acceptable and make the intended point more clearly.

I did not find any other claims or statements that could be construed as misleading and consider that these documents fairly represent the capabilities of the products.

I carefully studied the Mundane Software Web site at www.mundanesoftware.co.uk - a copy of which was provided to me on CD. I found no statements there that I was not able to substantiate.

Consequently, I recommend that Simply Project Office Version 1 be given the Silver Award and suggest that this assessment should now proceed to the Gold Stage. I suggest that The Mundane Software Company Ltd. be invited to supply details of up to two clients who have been using this application during the course of their business for a sufficient period to become well versed in the way it works. My intention is to interview the people who use this software and discover whether they are of the opinion that it works as it should.

S. Cotterell
20 September 2005