**TROUBLESHOOTING INFORMATION SYSTEMS AT THE ROYAL HOTEL**

**Introduction**

In early May 2015, after his first year in the master’s program at the Very Famous University (VFU), Blake Cantera landed a summer internship with Fancy Consultants & Company (FC). Upon receiving FC’s call, Blake was thrilled. FC was a highly regarded local IT consulting firm serving the needs of clients ranging from independent midsized hotels to large multinational grocery chains.

While small and nimble, FC afforded the opportunity to work with large clients on cutting-edge projects. It also offered significant potential for personal growth and, with its flat organizational structure, FC prided itself on picking independent and self-reliant young consultants who’d work immediately on projects rather than toil in the “analyst limbo” for years. This was the most appealing aspect of FC for Blake, who knew that he would be able to do some real work over the summer.

After a brief introduction to FC systems and culture and a two-week orientation discussing the FC approach to consulting, Blake was assigned to his first account. As expected, this was a relatively small account. On the bright side, Blake was sent alone to manage the whole project, from start to finish. He was thrilled; July had not even started and he was already doing some real work!

**The Royal Hotel**

The Royal Hotel in New York City was a luxury all-suite hotel primarily serving an executive clientele visiting Manhattan on business. Typically, these business guests stayed for three to six days, during which time they used their suite as a temporary office. Thus the Royal Hotel’s management had positioned the property to cater to the many needs of this busy and demanding audience. Amenities included in-suite plain paper fax, printer, and copier; three two-line telephones with voice mail and remote message alert; high-speed Internet access; and plasma TVs and entertainment centers in each of the 482 guest suites. The Royal Hotel also provided three restaurants and a coffee shop on the premises, a 24-hour business center, a fitness center, suite dining, laundry service, complimentary shoeshine, and dedicated high-speed elevators. While business fluctuated in relation to the economic cycle, the Royal welcomed over 150,000 guests per year, bringing in total revenues of upward of $30 million.

This made for a fairly complex operation that needed to run smoothly and consistently. Given the high percentage of repeat guests, it was important that guest rooms be spotless and consistently in working order.

**The Task**

As he arrived at the property for a one-week assignment, all expenses paid, Blake thought to himself with a smile, “I can get used to this . . .” But, with just enough time to take a shower, he had to get ready for a dinner meeting with the general manager (GM).

The Royal Hotel’s GM was a no-nonsense, old-school hotelier with a distinctive German accent. He quickly zeroed in on the task, in response to Blake’s comment about the “very good” quality of service provided by the Royal Hotel: “Our level of service is unacceptable! We are very good by most hotels’ standard, but we are not ‘most hotels.’ Our guests are extremely discerning; it is completely unacceptable to have a light bulb out in the bathroom when the guest checks in, particularly if she is a returning guest. And that’s not as bad as a stain on the carpet or a clogged toilet. I had one of my best customers call down to report a clogged toilet last week; can you imagine? Unacceptable! I need you to make sure this never happens again.”

As he sat listening to the GM, Blake briefly questioned the wisdom of taking on so much responsibility so quickly; he had not even finished his master’s! But this was a brief moment of doubt, and he remembered one of his father’s famous sayings: “Did you want the bicycle? Now you have to pedal!” Blake silently chuckled to himself and tuned back into the GM’s tirades with a confident smile. He already had the answer to the problem.

**The Solution**

After examining the property and interviewing a number of people, including the directors of housekeeping, maintenance, and IT, Blake recommended that the Royal Hotel adopt M-Tech’s Cappuccino! Rapid Response Solution (see [Appendix 2.1](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781943153046/epub/OEBPS/pro-piccoli3-0026.xhtml#app0201) for a description of the product). In his presentation to the executive team, highlighting the main advantages of the proposed information system, he mentioned the following:

* • *Rapid response.* The Cappuccino! application enabled the use of a phone interface, allowing housekeepers to report problems with the room (e.g., light bulb out) as soon as the problem was identified rather than having to wait until the housekeeper ended the shift and verbally communicated the problem to the maintenance department.

• *Quality control.* Since the new information system allowed immediate reporting of problems, it reduced the chance of “slippage through the cracks” occurring when housekeepers at the end of the shift forgot to communicate the problem. It also eliminated the risk that maintenance would forget or claim it did not receive the request.

• *Preventive maintenance.* The maintenance department would be able to identify recurrent problems and stop them before they occurred again.

• *Reporting.* Management would be able to extract a number of extremely valuable reports from the system (see [Appendix 2.1](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781943153046/epub/OEBPS/pro-piccoli3-0026.xhtml#app0201) for details). This would allow managers to reward best performers and motivate employees.

Upon receiving the go-ahead from the executive team, Blake negotiated with the vendor for the application license, configuration and start-up costs, support, and a week of on-site training. But as he was preparing for the upcoming rollout and implementation, he was called to a new account. This unexpected call was bittersweet. Yes, he would not be able to see his very first project through, but the partner at FC must have noticed his performance since he was being reassigned to a project with a regional credit union in Cortland, New York. Not quite New York City, but the project was larger and more high profile. This was a good move for a summer intern!

As Blake handed the Royal Hotel project to his replacement and classmate at VFU, Jack Scarso, he was a bit nervous. Having been on a couple of teams with Jack back at school, Blake did not hold him in the highest esteem. Yet, telling himself that Jack deserved a fair shake, Blake turned over all the paperwork and his draft information system design, adding a word of caution: “Jack, the GM is very impatient about this project. Make sure you don’t let his anxiety for an operational system rush you into a half-baked design. This is a complex operation, there is a heck-of-a-lot going on here. Good luck!”

***Sic Transit Gloria Mundi***[**1**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781943153046/epub/OEBPS/pro-piccoli3-0026.xhtml#fn262)

A month and a half had gone by since Blake left the Royal Hotel. While he heard from Jack a couple of times regarding minor questions, he assumed everything had gone well. He felt good about the quality of the material he had left with Jack, as well as the quality of the Cappuccino! application and the contract he had negotiated.

He had missed staying at the Royal Hotel, having traded down to a Ramada Inn across the street from the bank headquarters. But he felt good about the project as he wrapped up the documentation. A full-time offer was a sure bet!

“Here it comes,” Blake smiled as he recognized the cell phone ring tone associated with his boss’s personal cell phone. As he picked up, Blake quickly realized he was in for a surprise. Blake’s boss sounded quite unhappy as he said, “What happened at the Royal Hotel? I just got a call from the GM over there. He said that they did what you and Jack proposed, and they wasted a bunch of money on a system nobody is using! I had my doubts about Jack, but I thought you’d have no problem with this project. You don’t start school for another two weeks, right? My assistant just booked you on a flight back to NYC; you should have confirmation in your inbox.”

Blake realized that this was not the time to voice his own doubts about Jack. Rather, he simply took ownership of solving the problem and began modifying his plans on the fly. Out were the preclass barbeques and trading summer internship stories with classmates. Two weeks was probably just enough to attempt to straighten out the mess made by Jack. Blake’s attempts to get in touch with Jack were futile. Jack’s internship had ended and he was backpacking through the woods of Utah to, as he put it, relieve stress and recharge his batteries before school started again.

Upon returning to the Royal Hotel, Blake found that the machine dedicated to Cappuccino! was sitting in a corner collecting dust. It looked like it was abandoned soon after roll-out, a suspicion confirmed by the director of IT, who mentioned that the installation and training session had been smooth sailing. Employees had been very eager to learn about the system but seemed to lose that interest rapidly afterward.

The director of housekeeping and the director of maintenance did not have much to add, simply noting that employees found that the old manual system worked much better for their needs. The GM, on the other hand, had much to say, his German accent more pronounced than ever. The words were still ringing in Blake’s ears as he left the meeting: “I invested a lot of money in this software. You better deliver all the results you promised in your presentation.”

As Blake prepared to troubleshoot this failed information system and to devise a solution to make it work, he remembered the words of his information systems professor at VFU: “Focus on the information system design, not the technology investment!” “Therein lay the solution,” Blake thought with a tinge of hope.

**Discussion Questions**

**1.** Despite having relatively little specific information about why the system failed, what do you think are the main reasons for such failure?

**2.** How could you fix these problems?

**3.** Reflecting on this experience, what do you think were the main mistakes, if any, that Blake made in handling the engagement?