Starting an Object-Oriented Project

Reading books and magazines will not always guide you through your first object-oriented project. A recent issue of a trade magazine had 24 advertisements for CASE tools, 26 advertisements for products, and 23 advertisements for object-oriented consulting services. Add to this the lack of standards, and the process of adopting object technology looks truly daunting. However, there are great rewards as long as you are ready to follow a well-defined process and make a longer-term commitment.

You and your managers may think that the success of the move to objects depends on the size of the projects undertaken, the number of people involved, and the tools and techniques used. However, in reality these factors have little impact on the transition's success. As a rule of thumb, the transition of a single software development team to object technology takes at least a year.

You will most likely find your organization in one of two stages of adoption: the investigation phase or an early adoption phase. If in the investigation phase, your company is ready to make some investments, but is not sure yet if object technology is the right choice. The objective of your project, which should be important but not mission-critical, is to provide a feasibility proof and show the measurable benefits. If in the early adoption phase, higher management has probably made a strategic decision in favor of object technology, and it is expected that your project will make a significant contribution to the business and provide a competitive advantage.

There are several questionnaires that help in assessing where your company is in the transition process. Here are some questions that I have found useful:

- Can you formulate a business case for your project that will yield a measurable, positive net present value (NPV) for your organization?
- What are the investments necessary to fill the skill gaps found in your skills gap analysis?
- What are the specific success factors and possible risks for this project?
- What object architecture will you pick and why?
- What outcome of your project shows the feasibility of object technology for your organization or your whole company?
- What will you do with the existing legacy systems?
- Does it make sense to connect your project to the potential of the intranet and internet?

The object-oriented transition assessment workshop includes these and other questions. They have proven helpful for customers and, despite their simplicity, are surprisingly hard to answer.

Ramesh Balasubramanian
HP Professional Services Organization
Objects Consultant