"The R&D group is gone .."   **ACE Customer Experience**

The Customer
Well-established UK based firm, delivering advanced software tools to rehost complete IBM mid-frame applications (including COBOL, RPG and JCL components, together with database, printer and terminal definitions) to open architecture platforms (UNIX, LINUX and NT).

The Problem
After a conflict with the management, the 15 man R&D group leaves the company. The management is left with a software product with some unpleasant characteristics. It contains well over 5000 source files, has an intricate generation environment for various platforms and an elaborate testing procedure. Last but not least, it has hardly any overall systems documentation. The management thus is without a clue as to the potential of the product with respect to stability, porting, maintenance and possible future extension.

The Assignment
ACE was asked to analyze the product and to give its opinion on the stability and future possibilities of the product. This had to be achieved by performing an inspection of the source code and the development environment of the product, and by speaking to the key personnel just before they left the company. More specifically ACE was asked to provide the management with answers on questions like:

– how is the product built, what are its main components, how do they interact, in which areas is development still ongoing?

– how well can the product be ported to new environments (at the time portings were always done on the same machines, using the same pre-loaded shared file structure)?

– how can older versions or components be regenerated (for bugfixing)?

– what is the status of the test and validation environment? Are there any regression tests?

– what is the status of the documentation?

– under what conditions could a new team, possibly in a different environment, catch up with current customer requests and with possible future extensions of the product?

The ACE role
ACE was selected because of its vast and relevant experience that was well known to one of the Customer's managers who had previously been in contact with ACE. Within three weeks ACE

– conducted a number of interviews with key members of staff;

– performed a quick-scan through the sources and the build-environment;

– investigated the porting environments;

– assessed the status of the product as a whole, in relation to the questions that were asked;

– presented a concise report to the management.

The key expertise that ACE used was its in-depth knowledge and experience with:

– large software products;

– (UNIX) software development tools and environments;

– compilers, interfaces and various platform specifications;

– automated test and validation systems.

The Result
The report that ACE presented provided the management with insight in the product and its possible future. With the produced assessment, the management regained its grip on the possibilities of the product and was able to meaningfully plan their next steps.