

CHAPTER VI

OTHER OPTIONS AND OTHER SYSTEMS

118. The "Preferred System" and the subsidiary special features are the natural outcome of considering the Departmental requirements in the light of the state of the art regarding information retrieval systems. Although the launching of the project itself had fallen within the responsibility of the Departmental Electronic Data Processing Committee it was first necessary to determine whether it was a valid assumption that the best solution to the records management problems could only be found through the introduction of automation techniques. Two options based on traditional methods must therefore be considered.

Retention of the Present System

119. An attempt could be made to continue working on improvements within the present Records Management Division. These would be in the direction of upward reclassification of a number of the key personnel, principally the records analysts; some general reorganizational changes involving some reclassifications and the creation of more non-rotational positions; persistent efforts by Personnel Operations Division to keep the Records Management Division up to full manning level strength; changes in some procedures and a tightening up of operations generally. In the short run, limiting efforts to improvement of the present system would be temporarily more comfortable and have less traumatic effect than more radical changes. In the longer run the fundamental weaknesses would become more accentuated with increasingly deleterious effects on Departmental operations. Given the observed experience of the past twenty-five years, it would seem fair to say that the normal bureaucratic constraints within and outside the Department, and the pressures of other Departmental operational demands in a largely rotational service would tend over time to erode most improvements in the Records Management Division. Moreover, the major drawback of lack of close contact with the desk officer, so evident in the Departmental survey, would not be corrected. Physical separation also causes a psychological separation between the analysts and desk officers, which is difficult to overcome when their only contact is over a telephone.

120. Equally serious is the rapidly accumulating mass of keyword index cards held in the Kard-veyer equipment. This procedure was established in the belief that it would prepare the way for automation. Sampling of the index shows that under present arrangements the necessary quality for computer output is never likely to be achieved, and as an index to support a manual system it cannot yield benefits commensurate with the financial resources and effort being expended.

121. On these various grounds any plan of a largely palliative nature must be rejected as likely to fall far short of Departmental needs. Worse still, the potential for enhancing the quality of Departmental performance and of augmenting the general capacity would remain obscured and unrealized, particularly with respect to the Level III and IV activities.

Manual System Partially Decentralized to Bureaux

122. This option, if fully implemented, would undoubtedly bring some direct benefits to the desk officer users. It suffers, however, from some of the general criticisms described above and operationally would be more sensitive