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Addressing Symantec's Information Flow

Symantec grew significantly during the 1980s as it hired several hundred workers and generated tens of millions in revenue. As part of this growth, Symantec acquired three additional companies that were geographically separated from Symantec's headquarters in Cupertino, California. With the growth in employees and geographical divisions, many employees and executives began to believe that their information systems were not working. **Symantec has a problem with information flow and needs to find a solution to address their communication issues.**

Symantec is a company that exists to provide high-quality system and application software. The company sells a variety of software that can be targeted by home or business users. They offer data and project management applications, outlining and presentation software, along with utilities and antivirus software for MS-DOS, OS/2, and Macintosh computers. Symantec's wide variety of software packages and support for multiple operating systems means that they compete in the market by utilizing differentiation.

Symantec's problem with information flow is affecting the company *internally* and *externally*. On the internal side, employees complained that groups weren't sharing information between each other. Another common complaint was that there were too many channels, as employees could communicate involved email, phone mail, answering machines, fax machines, a regular mailbox, company newsletters, and meetings between groups.

On the external side, frequent downtime issues with the companies' LAN system and IT architecture caused employees to be less productive. The downtime and issues with IT systems processing data caused employees to have no work to do, as they were unable to enter purchase orders. This is an issue for both internal and external users of the system. Internally, the company is wasting money on labor. Externally, customers' orders may arrive later than expected or never be entered into the system. This will cause dissatisfaction among customers.

The company has several options on how to address their problem. The company could choose to go with Paige's beliefs, which was to hire additional people into the MIS department to help resolve issues and create training documents. Eubanks' solution could be implemented, which was to replace the current MIS director. Eubanks believed the current director was not being enough of a leader. Stewart, Wagner, and Johnson generally believed stressing communication and establishing policies was the best solution. The company could, of course, also choose to do nothing.

By hiring additional MIS employees, the company may be able to alleviate some of their issues with system errors and network downtime. This is a reasonable option, as additional employees in the group means that more issues could be solved in the same amount of time. Internal and external stakeholders would be more satisfied in the increased service level of the companies' information system. However, hiring additional employees does not address the issue with system lines being intolerable to line static and poor network wiring.

Addressing those types of changes would require a major system overhaul, rather than just hiring additional employees. The organization would have to take a bottom-up approach and determine "a baseline from which change can be measured, and … gathering this information reveals relative areas of strengths, weaknesses, and constraints in the current mechanisms for

acquiring and utilizing IT tools and data" (Cash 183). Morgan also says on a bottom-up approach that "the most successful innovations seem to involve systems of distributed intelligence where integration and coherence are built from the 'bottom up' in a way that allows 'higher' or more evolved forms of intelligence to emerge" (Morgan 74). This suggests that changes beyond additional hiring would be required.

The next possible solution is to simply replace the current director of the MIS group. This would affect internal employees as people working in the MIS department would have a new director to report to. External impacts cannot be determined, as the impact of a new director is unknown. However, replacing the director could impact how the MIS department works, as "organizations are mini-societies that have their own distinctive patterns of culture and subculture" (Morgan 125).

Replacing the director runs the risk that the culture of the department could change, potentially making the group perform worse. In an example Morgan provides, a company has a few rounds of executive changes that led to subcultures between old and new staff being formed and ultimately created "a superficial appearance of harmony while driving conflict underground" (Morgan 127). Given the serious changes the MIS department needs, it is best to keep the current director to prevent an "us versus them" mentality when implementing several significant changes.

Stewart, Wagner, and Johnson all had slightly different beliefs, but generally focused on increasing communication and setting corporate policies surrounding communications. This would have an impact on the internal stakeholders by giving employees guidance as to whom and when to communicate with other groups. External stakeholder could be impacted by the increased communication leading to better product experiences. However, this solution proposed

does not address the issues the MIS department is currently facing. Also, the company has tried to implement several measures to increase communications that have seemingly failed.

The final option the company has is to do nothing. Internal stakeholders will continue to see a lack of communication and information flows. External stakeholders will see no change in how the company current performs its operations. Ultimately, this is the best decision for Symantec to make. While it is true that the MIS department has its issue and that there is a problem with information flows, this is not because of the IT architecture. **The real problem is that the company does not have a defined organizational structure, which is causing the IT architecture to be lackluster.** Before investing time or money into trying to change the IT systems, Symantec needs to define their organizational structure better first.

The company is organized into product groups and centralized functions while also having multiple divisions from the companies they acquired. Each group controlled their product development, but other components were handled like a functional organization with centralized departments at the corporate headquarters. They're currently operating as a mix of the two and also consider themselves a matrix organization. According to Cash, one of the common issues in matrix organizations is that managers must adapt to information and power-sharing. "They must collaborate with each other, rather than rely on vertical authority" (Cash 111).

Because of this mix of organizational structures Symantec has implemented, it is too difficult for the MIS department to build out a system that supports both the functional and divisional ways of information flow in the organization. The functional groups within the company want centralized information where information is top-down, while in divisional groups the spread of information tends to be flatter. If Symantec better defines their organizational structure, they will be able to reduce or eliminate the conflicts that arise from

competing organization strategies. According to Morgan, "The quest for control of information in an organization is linked to questions of organizational structure" (Morgan 175). He also says that "Many aspects of organizational structure, especially hierarchy and departmental divisions, influence how information flows" (Morgan 175). Without their organizational structure thoroughly defined, Symantec cannot and will not have control over their information and the way it flows as the executives and employees would like it to.

Works Cited

Morgan, Gareth. Images of Organization. n.d.
Cash, et. al, Fried. Building the Information Age Organization. n.d.