Tuck School of Business
at Dartmouth

ProdCo and the Magus Networker Problem-Solving Process (B)

Denis Bourne held the final feedback workshop with ProdCo in conjunction with the company's annual conference in mid-February. This conference brought the senior and mid-level managers from all of ProdCo's technical operations to Johannesburg for three days of presentations and workshops. The aims of the workshop were twofold: first, to present the data which Magus Networker had generated in order to allow managers to identify all of the latent issues; and second, to decide how to address the specific problem of new product development.

At Denis' workshop, the group of managers reviewed a number of network diagrams, including those presented in part (A).

The chart that generated the most discussion was "Network Chart 6: Compliance with Protocols – Should Not." Tom Goode, a supervisor from the main factory, observed the large number of seemingly unnecessary communications he had regarding compliance with protocols. When he pointed this out, several other participants chimed in, agreeing that the compliance process seemed to involve too many unnecessary steps. Denis began to write their comments down on an easel pad, and within an hour the group had generated an outline for a new – and much simplified – compliance process.

Mark McClintock, an engineer in Satellite Factory 1, noticed that he appeared to have no important connections in "Network Chart 3: New Product Development – Is," but a great number of connections in "Network Chart 4: New Product Development – Should Be." At the start of the lunch break, he took Denis aside and confided that the charts seemed to show something that he had long feared: that he was not very effective at conveying information and expectations from the head office Technology group to his direct reports at the factory. Denis agreed to have lunch with Mark and his team in order to discuss this problem. Mark later recalled this discussion as instrumental in helping him learn to communicate better with his team:

> We…sorted the problem in a few minutes. The chaps I work with said that it was the first time that they felt really comfortable telling me 'the way it was,' but I had already got the message from the data. All they had to do was confirm to me that my interpretation was correct, and we moved right on to action.

ProdCo employees reached some other conclusions during the discussion forum. Many employees felt as though the organization was too "busy" and that responsibilities were sometimes unclear, leading to unanswered requests for information. As a result they felt forced to reach out to "old contacts" to get things done. In response, management committed to upgrading the directory software to allow forlocating

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employees by responsibility, and employees accepted a commitment to identify all information needed when making requests of their colleagues.

Reflecting on the workshop some time later, Alon Johnson recalled the strong impression it had made on him and the other participants:

> [The workshop] enabled us to have the best conference we have had in years. I witnessed the effect of the "reality-based data," as it was presented, and watched delegates' political agendas they had brought with them being discarded as the data appeared. In hindsight, I believe that the data was a great leveler, producing an environment in which the loudest voices no longer won the day.

> That year's conference was the most action-oriented we have ever had, and much was accomplished without the hidden agendas that had bedeviled previous meetings. A lot of these decisions were concerned with how we would handle the high rate of change in the technology of the industries we served.

> The management workshops not only identified the prime causes of our new product development difficulties, they also came up with a refreshingly simple and novel solution to the problem, over and beyond which they also gave me and my senior colleagues a concise set of actions needed to deal with some of the issues that we did not know about before the workshops. And yes, we did get our NPD programmers back on track again.