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Delivering Business Value with IT at Hefty Hardware

Technology

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The development of computers and Internet technology are great new tools that businesses probably never thought possible a century ago. But problems come with all changes in a business organization, and computers and the Internet are no different. Information technology (IT) is an important part of Hefty Hardware's plans to improve customer service. The problem is that the two groups responsible for making the plan work are not communicating.

The staff at Hefty Hardware is starting to take sides to go to war because of a lack of communication. The non-IT staff and the IT staff are very angry with each other. The groups cannot talk to each other. They are becoming angrier with each other every day. The VP of Retail Marketing and the COO are discouraged and question the point of having IT. On the other hand, the CFO Michelle Wright is receiving great input about Help Desk and ERP.

Hefty Hardware is a successful retail business with 1000 stores around the US. A new initiative is underway called Savvy Stores. Jenny Henderson is the IT Account Manager and she is the one in middle of the communications war. The other staff members from both sides trust her. She is a good listener and is able to see the bigger picture and look at the problems taking the long view.

The COO Glen Vogel and the VP of Marketing Cheryl O'Shea are very upset because when they take a good idea to the IT people they cannot give back the value expected. The IT people do not seem to understand that they are

being asked to do a straight forward business assignment. Glen and Cheryl agree that the computers work and the computer security is good, but all the IT does not give them the flexibility they need to give customers good and quick service.

The CIO Farzad Mohammed is feeling completely overwhelmed because of all the new projects he and his team are expected to deliver. The Savvy Store initiative is one of the top priorities of the company, so when Farzad receives an invitation from Glen to take a field trip to some of the stores, at first he is very angry. Glen realized that the business level at the Hefty stores is totally different from the world at the head offices. He invited Farzad and other IT people to go on a field trip to visit some of the stores to learn what is happening in the real world. His idea is to introduce the IT people the needs at the store level so they could see the practical side of what IT is expected to deliver.

At first Jenny was angry and thought that the business side of Heft needed to “ get its act together about what it wants from IT” (Smith & McKeen, 2010, p. 329). But after she paused to think she realized the problem was that business and IT had to find a way to work together “ collaboratively” on all their shared projects (Smith & McKeen, 2010, p. 229).

The problem IT personnel have communicating with co-workers is a famous problem and may TV shows even make jokes about how they talk without making any sense. People who work with IT all the time understand each other perfectly well but others do not understand the technical terms that are used. Kogekar (2010) says that changes have been made and some CIOs communicate perfectly well with everyone, but some cannot. The problem of

not being able to communicate with co-workers can even lead to an IT leader being fired even if they understand the technology very well (Kogekar, 2010).

The research lists many ways CIOs can change the way they explain their work to other people. First of all, none of the technical “ jargon” should be used with people who cannot understand it (Kogekar, 2010). A CIO already has the job so they should stop trying to impress everyone with all their knowledge about technology (Kogekar, 2010). That leads to the next recommendation: ask people questions to understand them better and to let them know you really are listening (Kogekar, 2010). A problem that is common is when the IT staff starts explaining all the technical ins-and-outs of a proposed project (Kogekar, 2010). All the technological talk is too much information, and non-techies do not understand it anyway (Kogekar, 2010). CIOs like to talk to the people who can understand what they are talking about, everyone does. The problem is that when the leader of a project is not kept in the loop, trouble is going to happen (Kogekar, 2010). Direction and discussion do not mean exactly the same thing (Kogekar, 2010). In meetings the people attending the meeting need to understand “ Are we having a discussion or is this the direction we need to take things when we leave the room” (Kogekar, 2010).

Running over budget on IT projects is a big and a common problem due to the very same lack of communication Hefty Hardware is experiencing. Ariker and Perrey (2014) warn that the hierarchies of power in a company need to be respected or the CIO will only make more trouble. They suggest some ideas that can help Hefty improve communications. Number one is to make

sure to clearly define how the CIO and the other IT people are expected to work with other members of the staff. On projects like Hefty Savvy Stores Glen and Farzad need to work out who is responsible for what issues. That may be hard to do at first, but after the project is rolling, they will be able to communicate back and forth a lot more efficiently. Ariker and Perrey (2014) recommend starting on a smaller project to practice better communication that is not possible for Farzad and Glen so they will have to work twice as hard to straighten out their own communication before the rest of the Heft staff can be expected to know what to do.

The executive coach, Joe Scherrer (2015) calls CIO communicating problems “malfunctions.” His suggestions to CIOs for how they can improve are written in IT-geek-terms but in regular people terminology his suggestions are good ones for Hefty CIO Farzad to use as a way to start changing from an IT geek to IT business vocabulary. Scherrer (2015) explains that a software bug is the same as low emotional intelligence (EQ). CIOs need high EQ and they can learn how to become emotionally smarter. Certified coaches are available to evaluate a person’s EQ and help them recognize their strengths and weaknesses. Farzad may decide that he and his staff need to have a workshop with an EQ coach so they can all work better with the business side of Hefty.

My recommendations include the great idea that Glen had for members of the business staff and the IT staff to get out of the headquarter offices and see what is happening in the everyday functions at Hefty Stores. What happens during the field trip might be great and everyone will be able to talk easily together. The trick is to keep the communication going well back at

headquarters. I think Glen and Farzad need to sit down together and as leaders of the Savvy Stores work out what tasks each of them are going to take responsibility for finishing. Secondly, Farzad and his staff need to tone down their geeky-communications, because the business staff cannot be expected to learn IT. Farzad can even decide to organize a workshop with an EQ coach to improve communications so the business side is not always angry with IT.

The CMO of SAP, Jonathan Becher said that “ we can’t treat IT like a back office function” (Ariker & Perrey, 2014). That made me think about how the CIO was pushed to the far right of the Hefty Hardware Organizational plan. A final idea that can really change the atmosphere at work, I think that Farzad should not be so isolated from the business leaders. He is a leader too but his IT department is kind of stuck on to the business departments instead of being a part of the decision making. (See appendix) I worked out a new organizational structure plan that allows the COO, VP Marketing and CFO to feel free to contact Farzad, the CIO for anything they do not understand and vice versa.

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Appendix

Appendix A

Organization Chart