



EMPOWERING INTRANETS TO IMPLEMENT STRATEGY, BUILD TEAMWORK, AND MANAGE CHANGE

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EMPOWERING INTRANETS TO IMPLEMENT STRATEGY, BUILD TEAMWORK, AND MANAGE CHANGE

D.KEITH DENTON

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This book is dedicated to my three most critical concerns—my son Shane, daughter Taylor, and grandson Kyle.

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Introduction

Empowering Intranets provides a hands-on approach for using Intranets to help you implement strategic initiatives, track, correct, and manage change, and build unity of action. What makes this approach unique is the new and original use of Intranet technology that was created exclusively to implement this book. Keeping a group, department, or organization focused on the big picture without getting lost in the details is an objective of many managers, but one that few actually reach or maintain.

It is becoming increasingly difficult for managers and workers alike to find their way in a work world that is interdependent and awash in a sea of information. For example, if you are an employee within a company, how do you know what is *really* expected of you and how your organizational goals are linked to your daily activities? If you are a leader, how do you measure performance and give members a feeling of purpose, cohesiveness, and motivation? How do you convey a collective vision while providing continual feedback about what is important? In the past, leaders were left with dusty charts and dull mission statements. Workers often toiled alone, oblivious to their larger purpose and with little specific feedback or direction.

This book and its supporting Web site, CIVID3.com, explain how to combine new interactive Intranet Web technology with powerful new managerial software to create an easier, more effective way to manage groups and simplify decision making. The foundation for this approach rests on three major tenets: first, that frequent feedback improves performance; second, that this feedback must be highly understandable and systematic to be useful; and third, that the feedback be specific to the task and individual involved. Additionally, this system literally provides a display or a “picture” of where the organization is at and how they are doing at keeping focused on (1) their purpose, or reason for being,

(2) their vision, or where they are headed, and (3) how they are doing in terms of achieving their purpose and vision. This last dimension is the most important and least understood factor in creating both focus and performance. Organizations need a reason for being and they need objectives, but these are often far removed from daily work. What is needed to convert objectives in performance is rapid, relevant, and easily understood feedback on how your members are performing.

Empowering Intranets is an innovative solution that integrates and displays your critical information in real time. It is the first system that graphically displays on a single desktop computer screen the status of your key organizational and group performance measures. It can combine outcomes and processes and subjective and objective information, and it can integrate and display these results in an easy-to-understand format. This approach drastically reduces the information overload within an office while still providing managers with more information so they can make better decisions and build organizational purpose.

All too often, executives try to create a big picture mentality by developing strategies, objectives, and tactics. More often than not, it simply creates a lot of talk but little change. Until now the planning process had relatively few ways to translate and transmit the voice of the executive down to the daily decision makers. Web technology, along with powerful new software, can be used to create a simplified information system that lets group members survey suppliers, customers, and themselves on a wide range of issues using both objective and subjective feelings, attitudes, and thinking. This information can then be integrated to create a holistic view of what is going on in the group or organization. Intranet technology, combined with new software (Quick Status), allows any organization to receive *immediate* feedback in the form of visual display via a computer screen. You can click on a screen and see a series of visual displays that show how the organization, department, or team is actually performing. This technology also has the capability to collect and combine objective data from individual team members, as well as information from external sources, such as customers, to show a true big picture of what is occurring. As such, it can also dramatically reduce the information and time needed to make effective choices.

This knowledge is then collected, analyzed, and graphically displayed on a single desktop computer screen using Management-by-Exception Consoles. A set of status lights on a Management-by-Exception Console will display red lights in the shape of a minus sign whenever a key measure or score is below competitive or historical benchmarks; green lights in the shape of a plus sign will indicate exceptionally good performance; and yellow lights are conditions in between normal and exceptional. A series of raw data and historical line graphs, as well as box graphs, can be accessed to help team members determine why certain lights appeared. Drilling down through these graphs helps you in correcting performance because you can see graphically how members' individual or group activities, efforts, attitudes, decision-making capabilities, and other processes are affecting those outcomes. It also lets you compare and contrast diverse outcomes, such as profitability to customer service outcomes.

Cross-training, multiskilling, horizontal organization, and even reengineering are often used in an attempt to create a more focused effort. They are good concepts. But few of them go beyond reviewing some general principles and guidelines. The Intranet can be used as a tool for turning these concepts into reality when combined with the highly visual and frequent feedback described here. *Empowering Intranets* gives managers a new tool and a better way of creating teamwork in groups, departments, or whole organizations.

The managerial concepts explained in this book and its supporting Web technology have wide-based applications. You can use the conceptual framework and supporting tools to help you better focus your organizational members. Working as a cohesive unit cannot be accomplished through mission statements, quarterly reports, departmental reviews, or charts on a wall. These lagging indicators, or after-the-fact information, simply show what has already happened. Such knowledge does nothing to help the present situation. Instead, what is needed are frequent and relevant feedback tools for making midcourse corrections. Intranet technology and new graphical tools can provide this critical feedback by displaying critical information in an easy-to-grasp format. You get a true picture of how your group members are actually making choices and what efforts are really being made to meet your objectives.

Team leaders, departmental managers, and members of normal groups, as well as geographically dispersed and virtual teams, need a better way of keeping on track. The process described here provides a way to physically link efforts and attitudes to key outcomes so members can collect critical information, analyze it, and react as a cohesive unit.

Ask yourself: How many management books truly have a technology for delivering their point of view? This concept does not simply supply people with information; it interacts and teaches them. *For the first time it will be possible to view the big picture visually, not as mere words, numbers, or mental images.* Using this process, anyone in an organization, department, or project group will be able to see at a glance who or what they are really about, where they are headed, and how they are really doing, all continuous and in real time.

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Chapter 1

The Purpose of Information Technology

Peter Drucker believes that there is an information revolution under way. The revolution questions the *meaning* of information, as well as its purpose. He states that until now, the information revolution has centered on the collection, storage, transmission, analysis, and representation of information. But things are changing, and the revolution will engulf all the major institutions of modern society (Drucker 1998).

Drucker believes the information technology establishment has so far largely ignored this information revolution. One of the reasons is that past computer and information technology has had barely any impact on strategic decisions. Drucker notes that current articulation and use of information does not affect management decisions. For instance, he believes that current use of information technology has little to do with executives deciding whether to build a new office building, school, hospital, and so forth. The current approach to information and computer technology has had no noticeable impact on the decision of an equipment manufacturer to enter a particular market. It does not help banks decide issues involving mergers. Drucker notes that the information technology revolution so far has been a producer of data rather than a producer of information (Drucker 1998).

The information technology personnel and other computer literates tend to blame this situation on “old school” executives who are unfamiliar with or afraid of the new technology. However, executives have not made use of the new technology because it has not provided them the information they need to make strategic decisions. There are reams of detailed data, but little that helps them keep strategic decisions clearly in focus. Internets, faxes, e-mails, and Intranet technologies provide more data but little direction. Business success is based on

creating value and wealth. The degree of success departments contribute depends on how well they support their organization's reason for being.

Drucker emphasizes that information technology has had a near-zero impact on management decision making. He asks, "What has it done to help preserve assets and control cost?" Clearly, the answer to this question can be important because a serious cost disadvantage can destroy a business, but information technology's strategic value has been extremely limited. Controlling cost helps you survive, but success will depend on carving out a successful strategy and sticking to it. Managing strategy is essential to finding innovative ways to add value, wealth, and even meaning to the lives of the employees. People need a sense of purpose, a focus for their energies. They normally do not need more data, technology, or speed. What is needed is technology that helps make sense of endless data so it can be turned into useful knowledge and work. Data needs to be refined so it can help focus our efforts. Refining data can ultimately help us make the correct choices and act in a unified way. None of this can come from unstructured data. Refining data so it becomes useful information requires tools that help organizations and groups keep focused on what they are really about, their mission, and where they should be going. Only when this occurs can you add true value, wealth, and meaning to work.

INFORMATION OVERLOAD

Information overload is created by the use of information technologies when the tie between information and human purpose has been severed; that is, information appears indiscriminately, directed at no one in particular, in enormous volume and at high speeds, and disconnected from theory, meaning, and purpose (Postman 1993).

Using technology without specific strategies has resulted in some rather odd facts of the "electronic age." Computer manufacturers had promised the paperless office. Instead, companies are still receiving shipments of office paper, which has risen 51 percent since 1983. This paper chase is just the tip of the information overload. In 1995, Americans possessed 148.6 million e-mail addresses, cellular phones, pagers, fax machines, voice-mail boxes, and answering machines—up 365 percent from 40.7 million in 1987. Throw in 170 million standard-issue telephones on top of that, and you will have a better picture of how overwhelmed we are with information. Meanwhile, technology continues to grow at an enormous rate. In 1998 a study released by Pitney Bowes, Inc., in Stamford, Connecticut, showed that the average businessperson in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom sends or receives 190 messages a day (McCune 1998). Among these daily 190 communications are 30 e-mails, 22 voice messages, 4 pager beeps, and 3 express mailings, along with faxes, phone calls, and letters (Martin 1998).

Jan Ashton is a manager for the Japanese laser manufacturer Nidek. She gets stressed keeping track of three different voice-mail boxes: "A wave of panic

shoots through me if I forget to check one” (Martin 1998). Such an attitude is the kiss of death when it comes to managing information. Trying to manage every detail only ensures a mismanagement of information. But that is what many try to do.

“There’s just so much out there that it is difficult to keep track of it all to do my job,” says Joseph De Walt, a network engineer for a midsize midwestern city. He declares that information technology (IT) people are all complaining that it is worse than ever. Everyone is on Internet time. “The compressed time for decision making is putting more demands than ever on our time,” says Wayne Cascio, a professor of management at the University of Colorado in Denver. “The Web provides huge amounts of data which many feel they will miss some important detail if they do not review all available data before making a decision” (Krill 2000). But everyone needs to recognize that they do not have to examine every bit of data. In the absence of some strategic driver, technology is causing information overload. Sharing of knowledge without some strategy only makes things worse.

Indiscriminate knowledge sharing is not confined strictly to electronic information. Employees are regularly bombarded with innumerable documents including performance improvements, booklets, safety manuals, employee directories, corporate resource directories, and so much more. The typical *Fortune* 500 company will publish thousands of such documents annually. Reducing this type of information overload not only increases productivity; it can also save enormously in terms of overhead. A Wells Fargo Bank in San Francisco cut its printing cost for small training manuals by almost half, saving at least \$100,000, and vice president of retail staff development Roger Addison notes that they are saving an unknown amount of trees (Johnson 1997).

Drucker’s call for technology that addresses the meaning and purpose of information seems to be lost in the normal process of acquiring information. Psychologist David Lewis notes, in a report commissioned by Reuters, that people are in a frenzy to acquire ever-increasing amounts of information. They remain firm in their belief that the more information you possess, the more powerful you become. According to Lewis, however, “The exact opposite is proving to be the case” (Bodil 1997). The problem is information overload. Research shows that when faced with vast amounts of information and forced to make decisions quickly, humans can be overcome by stress. Almost half (49 percent) of the respondents of telephone surveys of business executives in the United Kingdom, United States, Australia, Hong Kong, and Singapore feel that they are quite often unable to handle the enormous volumes of information they receive (Laabs 1999).

Terry Alan Beehr, professor of psychology at Central Michigan University in Mount Pleasant, Michigan, says that job stress is too often treated with medication or counseling rather than by making changes in the workplace and in workloads. Beehr believes that managers make the mistake of resisting organizational change and do not think of altering the source of job stress, such as long workdays, technological advances, work, and role conflict (Laabs 1999).

Psychologist David Lewis tells of working with chief executive officers (CEOs), many of whom he found to be tense, irritable, and overwhelmed. He calls it “Information Fatigue Syndrome” and says that one side effect includes a shortened attention span. According to Lewis, “One-third of managers are victims of this Information Fatigue Syndrome.” Forty-nine percent of these executives say they are unable to handle the vast amounts of information, 62 percent admitted that their business relationships suffer, and 43 percent of managers think that important decisions are delayed, and their ability to make decisions is affected, as a result of having too much information (Laabs 1999). When people are constantly interrupted or deal with vast volumes of information, some end up with shortened attention spans. Forty percent of those surveyed by Pitney Bowes stated that they are interrupted at least six times an hour (McCune 1998). Such disruptions make it hard to be reflective. Other side effects of Information Fatigue Syndrome include constantly being in a reactive mode, whereby you merely react to external stimuli such as e-mails, voice mail, and faxes. Only responding to information means that you have little time for proactive decisions. Lewis notes that information overload can leave you either paralyzed by the sheer amount of data you have collected or worried that the answer lies beyond the next Web site or report. You just can’t stop gathering information. The details, details, details become the driving force.

Individuals are not the only ones who are affected by this information overload. Organizations, departments, and work groups, too, can become crippled by too much data. The burden can be so heavy that some experts are even predicting the demise of strategic thinking. It seems that nobody has the time or inclination to think long-term anymore (McCune 1998). Although that may be an overstatement, there are indications that faulty decision making is occurring because of information overload. For instance, few offices monitor how relevant information is coming in and out of their business. They have no precise way to keep focused on this mission or the critical few things essential to their purpose.

SURPLUS INFORMATION

Collecting information, just like measuring performance, costs money, but few systematically assess the value of what they are getting. Data for data’s sake just compounds the information overload. The real question is, Are you tracking your critical information? Forty percent of those surveyed by Reuters said they believed the cost of collecting data outweighed its usefulness (McCune 1998). So much time is spent collecting, responding to, and analyzing information that it is easy to lose sight of the big picture. A critical question in dealing with information overload is how to identify if the information is useful or useless to your ultimate purpose. Data becomes information when it lets you know where you are headed and gives you a better understanding of how you are doing.

Information should not be plentiful or easy to share. Data is worthless unless it has some purpose to a group or individual. Information sharing that makes data readily available is more of a curse than a cure. You need a strategy before you search. Keeping focused on key organizational objectives is essential to any retrieval process. Ask yourself, “What do you want to do?” and “Is this data useful?” when you start gathering data; then collect frequent feedback about the usefulness of the data.

Christopher Meyer, director of Ernst and Young Center for Business Innovation in Cambridge, Massachusetts, asserts that in an information economy, the scarce resource is not information but rather the attention you give to certain information (Levine 1999). Meyer believes the biggest decision you make will be rationing your scarce attention. In an age of easily available information, Meyer emphasizes that the best defense is to have a way to focus your efforts. New technologies that help filter and redirect e-mail and telephone calls can certainly help, but ultimately it will require setting *priorities* within the process of information flow and identifying and tracking the “critical few” things that help define who you are, where you are headed, and how you are doing. Ultimately, it comes down to the single thought: “What activities are *you* personally responsible for managing?”

Robert Moskowitz, author of the book *How to Organize Your Life and Your Work*, echoes this thought when he says that the key to managing overload is to think strategically about your goals. In his consulting work, he tries to get executives to focus on the four or five things they most want to accomplish in the next year and then organize their time around achieving those goals. He says that in one fell swoop, you get rid of 50 percent of the information coming into your office because so much of it is not related to those top priorities (Tetzeli 1994).

Establishing priorities can begin with something as simple as asking your colleagues to identify urgent messages. This tactic is one many people do not use, but you can use it to help you identify information that is relevant to your key strategic objectives and mission of your organization. Start to think about what *really* needs to get done, rather than what is being done. William Bridges, founder and principal strategist at William Bridges and Associates, a Mill Valley, California-based consulting firm, notes, “It’s a matter of figuring out what work is necessary and what isn’t.... We need to take a close look at what we’re making workers do” (Laabs 1999). Merck and Company, the giant pharmaceutical company based in Whitehouse Station, New Jersey, analyzed, dissected, and reorganized work so that workers felt like they had more control over their workloads and schedules. Michelle Peterson, senior director of work/life flexibility, who oversaw the effort, explains, “We focused on the things that are really important to our customers” (Laabs 1999).

The Massachusetts Housing Finance Agency (MHFA), located in Boston, embarked on a comprehensive strategic planning process to determine whether the services they are providing to their customers are still relevant. Frank Creedon,

MHFA's director of corporate planning and development, explains that they did not get rid of job descriptions, but they did come up with eight core competencies they see as most significant for their people to accomplish. By focusing on what is important, they are starting to eliminate extraneous work (Laabs 1999). Tracey Borst, who heads the human resource team for San Francisco-based Air Touch Communications, Inc., says that senior management there is dealing with their information overload by trying to get better at prioritizing work throughout the company by letting employees know which company goals are most important. "Even if we had all the money in the world, we still wouldn't have enough people and would have to let some things fall by the wayside," notes Borst. "There's a limited number of resources to maintain customers and to create new products. You have to focus on what's most important and create a balance" (Laabs 1999).

PARETO PRINCIPLE

The nineteenth-century Italian-Swiss economist and sociologist Vilfredo Pareto (1848–1923) provided us with a deep insight into the way the universe operates. His knowledge can also help us deal with the information overload affecting so many people. The Pareto (pah-ray-toe) principle is often called the 80/20 rule and was originally applied to economic thinking. Pareto's studies showed that most (80 percent) wealth went to a small (20 percent) percentage of the people. His influential work had ramifications far beyond economics and the distribution of incomes. It seems he had discovered a fundamental underpinning of how the universe operates. The principle was later applied to everything from social warfare and medical cost to time management and writing reports. A so-called Pareto Distribution shows a universal relationship between variables. The most often cited example is that 20 percent of salespeople within a company or industry generally sell 80 percent of the products (Basile 1996).

The Pareto principle is truly a universal law that seems to have wide application within management. For instance, when it is applied to quality, it states that roughly 80 percent of effects can be explained by 20 percent of the causes. In practice, it is referred to as the "vital few and the trivial many" (Sorensen 1998). Studies tend to support those conclusions. In terms of quality issues, it often does seem to work out that about 20 percent of the causes are responsible for 80 percent of the defects in a process. The 80/20 rule has also been applied to inventory management, in which a small number of inventory items are the critical few ones. Likewise, in writing, it has often been noted that about 80 percent of the material that goes into research and articles will probably come from about 20 percent of your sources (Fryxell 1997). Those who suffer from information overload will also find that about 80 percent of the information received is the "trivial many." Only 20 percent will be of critical importance to your job, process, client, or decision-making process. The next few chapters will consider how

to narrow data down to identify the critical few pieces that, as Drucker says, add meaning and purpose to your work. Later chapters will look at how to automate the process using new software (Quick Status).

Overcoming the reluctance to discard the trivial things, purging some and ignoring others, can help begin to solve your information overload. The explosion and accessibility of information prey on the human weaknesses of many managers, which include a belief in total accessibility and a yearning for total awareness and absolute control. Attitudes like these ensure that technology cannot be a salvation (Martin 1998). Information technology, to be useful, must be combined with a conceptual rethinking of both the purpose and meaning of information that you are collecting. Luckily, today you have both the technology and conceptual processes to help prioritize your work life and dramatically reduce the blight of information overload. Part of this conceptual process involves identifying the critical few. It begins by training yourself to see information in a new way. Many people have a tendency to refuse to throw things away for fear they might need them later. However, if you cannot find a use for the information today or in the immediate future, chances are you probably would not even realize you have it anyway. Michelle Campbell, member of the Kansas City Express Network and president of M.D.Campbell and Associates, a human resource consulting firm, suggests asking yourself, “What is the worst thing that would happen if I should need this information and didn’t have it?” If the answer is not earth shattering, go ahead and discard it. Consequences should determine the importance (Warbington 2000).

The process of eliminating information overload involves more than performing a simple mental exercise. Eliminating trivial information, as well as unproductive efforts, activities, and thinking, will be of little value if you and your organization do not have a clear focus. Overload can be controlled by setting up a system of identifying and tracking high-priority information concerning your efforts, activities, and decisions that impact strategic concerns. You can begin this process by making a list of your critical people, activities, and capabilities involved in this process. The list may include people, such as supervisors, clients, coworkers, or vendors. This “A list” may also include essential processes, products, procedures, activities, capabilities, or even decisions that need to be made. Once this list is compiled, you can be on the lookout for those materials, processes, and information that are critical to your key concerns. Next, track the percentage of your total workday that you are able to stay focused on the A list. If you do this, you will probably be surprised at the amount of time and effort being devoted to trivial information and superfluous activities.

TECHNOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS

As work becomes more knowledge intensive, finding new ways of communicating this *essential* information becomes paramount to our ability to make de-

cisions, build cooperation among group members, and coordinate unified actions. Information overload will be the driving force in creating the demand for knowledge management tools. The Gartner Group, Inc., of Stamford, Connecticut, estimates that U.S. companies produce 5.5 billion documents annually (Moad 1998). Unstructured data makes up 85 to 90 percent used each day across large enterprises, and it will be necessary to create strategies and prioritize critical issues.

Finding easier ways to integrate strategies and visions within a group, department, or organization will be essential to adding value, wealth, and meaning to work. Internal Web technology, or so-called Intranets/Extranets, has been used primarily as an electronic library to store data and to inform members of a group. But simply sharing information with people is very different than actually encouraging communication. Making independent actions is very different from working as a team. Making intelligent decisions and focusing everyone's efforts require more than simple guidelines or using a one-way flow of unstructured data. Taking the next step toward truly unifying an organization demands interactive, two-way dynamic flow of information. An essential part of this process is technology that helps you focus on specific critical information rather than drowning you in a sea of details that some new technology encourages.

Information overload is one of the drivers involving discussions about "information filters" to help cope with the volumes of data coming into the typical office. E-mail filters are already being used to screen out less-than-critical messages. IBM has been experimenting with a technology known as Web intermediaries, which can make it easier to focus on specific information (Krill 2000). There are also technological aids to help organize your information. A system called Wildfire, for instance, gives you messages ("I sound like a person, but I'm really a computer," say ads), responds to various commands ("Alan Greenspan called; call him back!"), and routes calls as you direct. It lets you voice-dial from anywhere, arranges conference calls from anywhere, and does much more (Martin 1998). Technological solutions like these, however, can just exacerbate the information overload problem. They do not restrict how much information you receive; they only make it easier to focus on specific information. It may be a start, but it is not the same as tracking and automatically reporting data to you that is of critical importance to your key objectives.

You cannot look at everything—this is part of taking control. Luckily, today, we also have technology that can help us focus on what is important. People do get lost in the detail and lose their focus. Alan Lightman, a humanities professor and physics lecturer at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Massachusetts, points out that the information flood and the fast pace of high-technology, information-sharing systems often produce bad decisions because managers feel rushed (Krill 2000). Consistently good decisions will only occur when there is a better understanding and awareness of the risk of information overloading. Recognizing the problem can help you develop an information management strategy that works. Such an information management

system can then transform data into information and information, in turn, into knowledge. Such a system can then create better teamwork because it gives a focus to the information. It can help create a sense of shared values and purpose. To do this will require using Web technology in ways far beyond simply as a tool for sharing information or helping virtual teams function. It will involve using Intranets as a means of providing rapid and visual feedback.

OVERVIEW

Information technology is perhaps the most visible contributor to information overload, but there are many others as well. Such things as economic, technological, and business downsizing, skills shortage, and low unemployment have forced those American workers who were left sitting on the hot seat to give 150 percent just to stay on top of their workloads. Overtime in the U.S. manufacturing industries averages about 4.7 hours per week, and it is more than 5 hours in durable goods industries. Those figures, the same for 1996 and 1997, were alltime highs since such things began being recorded in 1956. Likewise, according to a 1997 study conducted by the Families and Work Institute, a nonprofit research group in New York City, the average workweek for a professional has stretched in the last twenty years to almost forty-eight hours from forty-five (Laabs 1999).

More information has been produced in the last thirty years than the previous five thousand. The total quantity of all printed material is doubling every five years and is still at a steady pace. In seven months of 1996, the number of documents on the Web grew at more than 100 percent—from fifty million in May to eighty million in December (Laabs 1999). Such information overload can quickly lead to paralysis of analysis, making it harder to find the right solutions and make good decisions.

Computer and information technology has generated a vast flow of data and is the major player in the information overload scenario. Because far more data is available than one can actually take in, the information revolution remains one that has surprisingly little effect upon what decisions are made. As Peter Drucker argues, the key to creating information technology that impacts decision makers is to focus the meaning and purpose of information. This book and supporting Web site, CIVID3.com, can be used as a tool to better manage information and the workplace. Intranets can be used to control and redirect effort while reducing the information overload. They do so by focusing organizational or group personnel on their “critical few” concerns. Much of the information we receive is surplus and not relevant to what we are supposed to be about or where we are supposed to be going. Intranets can be used for tracking, analyzing, and creating new knowledge. Today, Intranet technology, unlike the information filter that simply restricts information, can help you identify your critical information needed to make good decisions.

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Chapter 2

Finding Your Focal Points

According to John MacKenzie, it is easier to move natural gas from one end of the continent to the other than to keep a dozen workers moving in the same direction. MacKenzie, the director of strategic direction at Trans Canada Pipeline, says that when he contemplates building a new multimillion-dollar gas pipeline, it's not the technical challenge that fuels his fears, but the people. His main concern is, How fast can the company get twelve to twenty key people working like a well-oiled machine (Wilkinson 1998)?

DETAILS, DETAILS, DETAILS

The everyday work world is often filled with endless details and low-level decision making. All of this, of course, is usually out of the sight and minds of senior-level executives. For many, the work world is a maze of disjointed efforts. The problem for an organization or even a group is that such individual thinking and behavior are frequently at odds with other well-meaning and purposeful behavior. As group members, we try to do a good job and digest as much information as possible, but we often receive mixed signals. Senior executives always seem to be making references to vague platitudes like customer service, quality, or teamwork. There are procedures to adhere to and rules to follow, but many of us are left with a sense of vagueness. Some people may even like it this way because it lets them interpret things to suit their own needs.

One point most of us can agree upon is that work contains a great deal of distorted and detached information. Everyone is moving, but often not at the same speed or in the same direction. One minute we are supposed to be controlling

overhead, and the next we are concentrating on customer service. Ask yourself, How many employees, departments, or groups in my company specifically understand the implications of their mission or *true purpose* for what they are doing? If you believe *you* know the implications of your group's mission or purpose, how many others in your group would agree with your assumptions? How many members of your group function as if they had a single heartbeat and make consistent choices and actions? How many within your group or organization really understand how they are doing or the relevance of their efforts to the group?

I am not talking about being able to recite a mission statement. The reality is that many of us have little awareness of our organization's true mission or higher purpose. We become lost in endless details. Few know:

- The purpose or ultimate objective of their group.
- How to make consistent decisions and behavior toward those ends.
- How their efforts, choices, and attitudes fit within this big picture.

We spend so much time focused on the details of our daily lives that it is easy to forget the purpose or uniqueness of our actions. We are so busy figuring out *how* to do something that we forget to ask *why* we are doing it and whether it is getting us anywhere. And even when we do have a moment to lean back and ponder, there is no system to help us understand where we are headed, where we are at, or how we are doing.

Frederick Taylor wrote in 1911, "The system must be first" (Sink and Smith 1999). Creating an effective work system entails linking strategy to operation objectives. It means tying objectives to results and then measuring performance and making corrective changes. A coordinated performance measurement is an essential ingredient to being able to see the big picture rather than just a jumble of pieces. The focus of today's work measurement remains not on the larger system but on the work center or even the individual worker. By focusing on larger units of analysis, the American Society for Quality and the accounting faculty at the Harvard Business School have been leaders in improving measurement methodology. A good work system must generate a clear and unambiguous sense of shared purpose or group identity. To allow anything else only encourages anarchy in which employees create their own sense of purpose. A good measurement system begins with group members sitting down and assessing their current situation and leads to discussion on what their true reason for being is. This reason for being might revolve-around a production or service problem or around issues involving profitability or service issues. Developing such a reason can take several weeks or months of discussion. Time should then be spent identifying your strategic objectives and your critical concerns that relate to these objectives. These are not particularly unique steps, but only today do we have the technology to turn these words into action and provide the rapid