

Case Study In Operations Management

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ABSTRACT

This case study is conducted within the context of the Theory of Constraints. The field research reported in this document contains information specific to the telecommunications industry. An examination of the history, organization design, problems and solutions for one telecommunications company are undertaken from the perspective of academic work in the Theory of Constraints. The information included in this document was developed through interviews with four senior managers including the President, the Chief Technology Officer, a Vice President and a department manager. Their responses were the basis of identifying problems and undesirable effects. The undesirable effects were diagrammed in six UDE clouds dealing with the following issues: 1- unclear vision from management to employees; 2- supplier; 3- market; 4- the price and regulation environment; 5- production; and 6- bureaucracy. These undesirable effects were logically examined until a single cloud depicting the core conflict was found. This core conflict is the company cannot simultaneously choose to make money over time through both conducting business as usual, and through means that are adapted to the environment and customer needs. Solutions tried to date by the company are explained. These solutions are reviewed from both an internal and external perspective. Alternative solutions are examined, as are obstacles to reaching the desired state. The case concludes with thoughts on the future desired state.

INTRODUCTION

The Theory of Constraints, introduced by Eliyahu M. Goldratt, is a philosophy of management and a means of achieving improvement that focuses on finding and correcting the weakest link in a chain of events (Goldratt, 1992). Today, Theory of Constraints philosophy has been, and continues to be, utilized in many practical applications in production, project management, distribution, supplier relations and other areas. In order to review the underlying concepts within Theory of Constraints, this field research is conducted as a means of evaluating conditions in the current telecommunications environment. The application of these concepts should be of interest to the practitioner and academic alike as achieving improvement is a continuous area of management concern. The process of evaluation undertaken here can be similarly used in other situations and industries.

OVERVIEW OF THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY AND ENVIRONMENT

The telecommunications industry is characterized as serving consumers and businesses by installing infrastructure, managing or providing business services, and providing services to consumers.

The telecommunication services industry includes firms that provide electronic communications using wire networks or fiber-optic lines. The U.S. wireline infrastructure consists of over 750,000 miles of aerial wire, 3.5 million miles of cable, and more than 4.5 million miles of optical fiber (Encyclopaedia of American Industries, 2001). The services provided often utilize satellite and microwave systems as well. Long distance carriers typically pay a fee to have local carriers route long distance calls to their lines.

HISTORY

The Telecommunications Act of 1996 (Federal Communications Commission, 2003) maintained that the industry was largely divided into long distance carriers and local telephone companies. Local companies provide basic telephone services by bringing telephone access lines into homes, connecting new customers, and servicing local lines

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