

Framing the Futures: Case study

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Cyberfutures is a software development firm that employs about 150 people in its Hamilton, New Zealand headquarters. The company was founded eight years ago and has enjoyed steady growth. The guiding philosophy of the firm has been to run the company like a large family. There are frequent celebrations, birthday gifts, informal gatherings, and everyday except Wednesday is dress down day. The company dress code is very informal, except for Wednesday. The company takes pride in breaking the mold of contemporary organizations. Employees respond favorably to this management style and are further reinforced by increased sales, profit and bonuses.

Last year, the company decided it was time to expand. There were many other markets across New Zealand and Australia that could to be tapped into by the company. Otherwise their competitors would grow too strong. The organization's strategy was to set up 6 satellite offices: Wellington, Christchurch, Auckland, Sydney, Melbourne, and Perth. Each of these would be staffed by 8-12 employees.

Management believed that much of the organization's success was based on the corporate culture created by the informal Hamilton headquarters. Part of the strategy was to transplant two or three Hamilton employees to each new office to help establish the desired culture.

For the first time in the organization's eight years, profits began to drop. While the Hamilton office boasted high morale and productivity, the six satellite offices were losing money and expressing dissatisfaction. A communication audit was done and the results were fairly clear: the employees away from Hamilton lost their sense of connection to the corporate culture that provided a fertile climate for motivation and productivity. The management decided to implement radical changes in the communication channels among all of the offices. At great expense, each of the new offices was equipped with full-motion, state-of-art video/conferencing as well as the technology for web-based conferencing. Cyberfutures' management believes that proper training is necessary in order to fully use these technology channels to their fullest potential.

Discussion questions:

- How would you assess Cyberfutures' chances for successfully "transferring" their Hamilton culture?
- How can the cultures of the satellite offices be nurtured given the current set-up?
- Is the conferencing technology a wise expense? Are there certain situations that should not be handled via electronic communication?
- What should the training consist of?
- What other recommendations would you make?

¹ Case study adapted from: Yuhas Byers, P. (1997). *Organizational communication : Theory and behaviour*. Needham Heights, MA : Allyn and Bacon. p 354.

