

Sturgel Division

>Abstract

This case profiles Martha, the manager of the Information Services division of Sturgel. She is trying to determine whether a survey of users should be conducted annually to assess the quality of service provided to the other divisions of the company, with the results used to make policy and procedural changes in her division. If a survey is deemed appropriate, the student is asked to design the survey.

>The Scenario

“Now that I write it all down, I see we have changed a lot!” mused Martha as she put the finishing touches on her annual status report. “In fact,” she went on, “the name Information Services indicates most of the changes. We used to be Information Systems.”

Martha was Information Services (IS) manager for the Sturgel Division of a major manufacturing company. Sturgel developed and manufactured (mostly small) household appliances on a 230-acre site in the southeast part of the United States. While she had managed the IS department for only 15 months, Martha had been part of the department for nine years, all at the same location.

The late 1980s and early 1990s were a time of many changes for the information systems departments in most companies, including the Sturgel Division. Technological change drove most of the organizational change: The price performance of most computer equipment had improved by compound rates of perhaps 30 percent per year for several decades. This meant that many companies perceived that they no longer needed a “computer center.” Individual users could simply do whatever they needed to do on a desktop computer in their own offices.

Martha made a rough list of the major influences she’d dealt with over the last few years, calling them “IS Transitions.” They included:

- From running the computer to providing information services to the company.
- From “owning” the data to consulting with user departments about use of the company’s information resources.
- From emphasizing mainframes to emphasizing terminals, personal computers, and telecommunications. Indeed, sometimes it seemed that the telephone, word processing, and clerical and library departments had all been combined.

- From developing the company's applications to advising users on how to develop their own applications.

Each transition had been difficult, for each required its own combination of hardware, software, data, procedures, and people, most of which were different at the end of the transition.

Currently, the Information Services department had four sections, each with a manager who reported to Martha:

- 1 *Systems operations.* The systems operations section ran two mainframe computers and one minicomputer that operated as a telecommunications "node" and link to other divisions and corporate headquarters. This section provided operator support for three shifts of operation, as well as systems maintenance, operating system updates, and so forth. The vendor of the mainframes handled hardware maintenance.
- 2 *Application development.* The application development section really should be renamed, Martha thought. Most of its activities involved database design and maintenance, though two small groups developed financially oriented applications and maintained several software packages aimed at serving the (fairly small) engineering staff at Sturgel.
- 3 *PC services.* The PC services section developed division standards for personal computers at Sturgel and consulted with users who wanted PCs of their own. The users purchased PCs out of their own budgets, but they were required to meet certain hardware and software standards as set by IS. This section also evaluated general-purpose software, such as word processing and spreadsheet packages, and recommended to users when they should switch to a new version or release. They also did a fair amount of "hand holding" for users who had difficulty in developing their own applications.
- 4 *Telecommunications.* The telecommunications section maintained the local area network at the Sturgel site as well as links to corporate headquarters and other company divisions. This section also advised users on such activities as links to legal databases and information retrieval services, though that activity, thought Martha, might really fit better in the application development section.

Martha felt good about the organization in general. While it had been a bit of a scramble to develop an organization that could deal with the fast pace of technological change in the computer field, she felt they had more or less done it. One part of it still made her nervous, though. The biggest theme in all the changes, from an IS perspective, was the change from computing and running computers to serving large numbers of people directly.

She felt they were providing good service, but she had no regular way of knowing how her users perceived it. She thought she should consider a regular survey of her users and their perceptions of service received from the IS department. That way, she figured, she would be in a position to have data to back up

her informal sense, and she would (presumably) learn about changes in those perceptions (for better or for worse) more quickly.

- > **Discussion**
- 1 Martha would like you to develop an appropriate research design.
 - a What kind of survey should Martha run, or should she?
 - b How should it be administered?
 - c What kinds of forms, questionnaires, or other survey approaches should be developed?

- > **Sources**
- Used with permission of Peter G. Bryant and Marlene A. Smith, *Practical Data Analysis: Case Studies in Business Statistics*, Irwin, 1995.