Whitmann Price Consulting: MIS and DSS Considerations

Josh and Sandra are planning several key management information systems for Whitmann Price Consulting (WPC)'s new Advanced Mobile Communications and Information (AMCI) system to accommodate its various business units. Recall that WPC is composed of six consulting areas: Audit and Assurance, Crisis Management, Human Resources, Performance Improvement, Tax, and Transaction. Information systems are being designed for horizontal business needs that stretch across all areas, as well as the vertical needs of each consulting area.

A common need expressed by all divisions is to have access to a personal information management system that provides software for keeping track of appointments and contact information for customers and colleagues. While the BlackBerry devices provides such software, Josh and Sandra determine that information regarding clients and colleagues is best stored in a central database where it can be shared with others in the organization and used for auditing. A database and MIS will be developed to provide storage and access to this information.

The Calendar MIS will run queries on the data and present reports that show monthly, weekly, daily, or hourly schedules for one or more consultants. The electronically presented reports can be used as forms to edit or add appointments. Calendars can be shared between consultants to easily allow them to schedule meetings during times when everyone involved is available.

The Contacts MIS will provide all relevant contact information for clients and consultants as well as a field for adding notes. A contact added to the database will be visible to everyone in the organization. Reports can be generated to show a single contact, a group of contacts associated with a particular job, or all contacts.

Another common need for all WPC divisions is the ability to access and edit billing records for clients. Josh and Sandra recommend that WPC develop an MIS that allows consultants to view the history for a particular client, and add hours for billing. This MIS could interact with the Calendar and Contacts MIS's. For example, from a Calendar appointment, the consultant could click a link that adds the amount of time used for the appointment to the customer billing record. Likewise, from a client's entry in the Contacts system, a link can be clicked to open the client's billing information.

Communications systems such as e-mail and voice mail are also forms of MIS that store, organize, and present communications information. Fortunately for WPC, their cell phone service provider offers these systems and BlackBerry devices accommodate them. Little in the way of development or set up would be required of the WPC IS staff.

The vertical systems to be developed to accommodate the unique needs of each consulting unit fall mostly under the category of decision support system (DSS). These systems accommodate specific decision-making tasks required by these professionals. Consider the following examples:

- Auditors and tax consultants require mathematical models that speed calculations for special business scenarios. Several DSSs can be developed that allow auditors and tax consultants to enter customer information to produce reports that guide the advice that they offer clients.

- Crisis management consultants require DSSs that allow them to estimate the total financial loss in cases of complex disasters.

- Human resource consultants require DSS tools that guide them in advising clients on workforce budgeting and balance.

- Performance improvement consultants make use of several statistical and mathematical tools that allow them to advise businesses to setting achievable and beneficial goals.

When implementing the new AMCI system, systems analysts will work with each consulting area of WPC to develop the MIS and DSS systems that they require.