Information

Sources of Information

Internal information

- **Company operations**

External information

- **Intelligence gathering about competitors' activities**

- **Information about population shifts**

- **Economic and social factors**

- **Government legislation**

Levels of information

♦ **Operational information**
  – daily events and transactions: employees' pay, orders, invoices, payments, stock levels

♦ **Tactical information**
  – middle managers need to know how fast items move, how quickly stock can be replenished, how well a new product is selling, when is store most crowded

♦ Strategic information
  – **historical, environmental and local information may be used to build computer 'models' which help to forecast future changes or needs**

Quality of information

To be useful to a manager, information needs to be:

- Brief
  - as concise as possible: too much detail can result in overlooking vital facts. The principle of *reporting by exception*
- Accurate
  - inaccurate information leads to poor decisions and a loss of confidence in the information source
- Up-to-date
  - e.g. a booking or ordering system
- Timely
  - reports must reach the right person at the right time
- In an appropriate format

Channels of communication

Data and information flow will depend on:

- **The nature of the information**
  - whether routine or 'ad hoc' information
- **The organisational structure**
  - size of the organisation and the number of management 'layers'
- **The amount of processing to be done**
  - on the data, and the frequency of processing
- **Geographical spread**
  - between the different parts of an organisation

Presenting management information

Numerous different ways include:

♦ **On computer printouts**
- – using the principle of exception reporting for brevity and clarity;

♦ **On a VDU**
- – a report or a 'slide show' produced using a presentation graphics package, for example;

♦ **Desktop published**
- – incorporating company logo, graphs, diagrams, photographs etc;

♦ **Orally**
- – 'over the grapevine', by telephone or in formal presentations;

♦ **Using videoconferencing**
- – to enable several people at separate locations to participate in meetings and information exchange;

♦ **Over a company-wide Intranet**
- – internal network to which all employees have access and on which important information can be posted

The intended audience

♦ The way that information is presented will depend to a large extent on who it is intended to reach.

♦ Information on products and sales may be intended for:

  – **Customers**

  – **Wholesalers**

  – **Company Accountant**

Some type of presentation

♦ **Graphs and charts can be very effective to highlight problems or trends**

♦ **Information can be gleaned at a glance**
  – **Bar charts good to identify trends**
  – **Line graphs good to highlight seasonal figures**
  – **Pie charts show composition of total – as long as number of segments is limited**

Guidelines for presentations

A presentation could for example take the form of

- a talk accompanied by overhead projector transparencies or slides, or
- a slide show prepared in PowerPoint or a similar graphics package.

Either way, the information on each screen or slide should be:

- Simple
  - no more than 5 or 6 clearly legible lines, in clear English;
- Brief
  - bullet points are a good communication tool;
- Visually appealing
  - don't use too many different fonts, or all uppercase letters. Graphs and charts are useful where numeric information has to be imparted.

Marketing information

Customer information is a valuable asset. Collected:

- **When a customer makes a purchase or orders a catalogue**
  - their name and details are added to a customer database
- **When customer fills in a guarantee card**
  - frequently asked to provide information about products they own, income group, no. of children etc
- **People visiting a company's Web site**
  - can be asked to 'register' by providing personal information before gaining access to the site
- **Companies buying mailing lists from other companies selling related products**