A Case of Oil and Information

The current Canadian-federal government\(^1\), elected as a minority leadership fourteen months ago under a strong environmental campaign, is now facing its toughest challenge. On August 25\(^{th}\) 2010, a 10,000 metric ton National Petroleum (NP) oil tanker ran aground off the coast of Newfoundland, and the uncontrolled spill is rapidly approaching St. John’s – the capital and economic centre of the province. While the Premier of Newfoundland has in the past managed several smaller incidences locally, his marine and oilfield advisors are very concerned about this spill’s potential for catastrophic consequences to the fishing industry and to wildlife, both in Canada and in the United States of America.

For oil spills that have occurred over the past ten years a 2-person unit of the Disaster Recovery office has diligently worked with the affected petroleum company(ies) and local volunteers to organise clean-up efforts and wildlife rescues. Although the disaster recovery personnel maintain that they are up to the task, it is becoming apparent to the advisory team that the unit does not have the expertise, people-power, or systems to manage the hundreds of daily requests for information and receipts of information both locally and internationally. In addition, since fishing and ecotourism are mainstays of the province’s financial health the Premier’s advisors issued an email to the Premier dated Sept 4\(^{th}\), 2010 where they are recommending that the management of the “08/10 NP spill-recovery” effort be escalated to the federal government.

As a first priority, the Premier’s advisors would like a provincial **Unified Command Centre (UCC)** formed, with the objectives of:

(a) centralizing credible information that can be used for decision support,
(b) integrating their Disaster Recovery office systems (such as they are) with that of the Ministry of Fisheries and Oceans (federal),
(c) distributing information to stakeholders - including the general public, US officials, etc.
(d) soliciting support from independent service volunteers
(e) receiving feedback from stakeholders, and
(f) coordinating recovery efforts with other related agencies, such as The Oil Spill Control Association, The International Spill Control Organisation, and the Humane Society.

The issue was escalated to the Prime Minister (PM) who has recently come under heavy fire from the media regarding inconsistencies in provincial and federal communication statements about the extent of the spill, and perceived slow governmental response to date. On Sept 12\(^{th}\) the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans was given the PM’s mandate to present a proposal for a new provincial system(s), along with any additional requirements, in 14-days. On Sept 15\(^{th}\) a request for proposal (RfP) was issued to you - a government approved information professional - to design a provincial UCC with information system(s) that manage information receipts and requests from the petroleum company, federal sources, volunteers, environmental agencies, partnerships, the media, and other international governments and organizations; while utilizing limited resources to maximum effectiveness.

A foundational part of the centre would be an information system that helps the Premier develop an intelligent communications strategy, given the high number of demands for updates to multiple audiences, and a limited number of staff and volunteer supporters. The two questions that keep the Premier up at night are who should respond to which queries from the

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\(^1\) This is a fictitious case developed as part of a learning exercise for the INF 1003 class and in no way reflects on the current administration nor on a disaster recovery effort past or present.
media, and how to ensure that the messages are consistent? Key requirements for the information system(s) in the UCC are:

- An interface with the federal communications system
  - Generating reports on volume of oil entering the ocean hourly; marine and wildlife affected;
  - Updating provincial communications plan data every 3-hrs.
- Organisiation of key messages, media profiles, information for public consumption;
  - Developing a database of key messages shared with whom/when;
  - Access to correspondence between the petroleum company and the government of Canada;
  - Access to correspondence between the government of Canada and the United States government.
- Gathering of relevant information, and evaluating the credibility of:
  - Reports on oiled wildlife
  - Sentiments on the web about issues
  - Media reports
  - Web information
  - Opinion polling and tracking.
- Distribution of information
  - Figuring out where/when and about what issues to hold public meetings
  - Publishing newsletters, blogs, e-zines.
- Making use of social media to deliver key messages and engaging others.
- Managing partnerships with schools, young people, other agencies.
- Reporting oiled shoreline or request volunteer information.
- Managing submissions for alternative response technologies, services or products.
- Managing submissions from the public on damage claims.

For Assignment 2 you will develop a **high-level proposal** that makes a recommendation for the type(s) of information system(s) (e.g. DSS, OSS, Simulation and visualization systems, GIS,..) to be deployed at the UCC and how they will interact. As you prepare your proposal, you should review the case analysis framework in Chapter 3 of the text *Interpreting Information Systems in Organizations* (2009) by Walsham. You may also consider information freely available on the internet from similar past recovery efforts (being conscious of the credibility of sources). In this assignment, you will conduct your research and discussion in your groups (teams) but will submit an individually written proposal. You should appropriately cite your group members’ contributions in your individually written work. The required report sections will be provided in the assignment definition. Having a group assignment with individual submissions enables to you learn from your peers and share ideas to help guide the overall perspectives and thoughts that will make up the content of the report but allows you to be assessed on your individual contribution. Assessment of your individual contribution will include how well you have been able to synthesize ideas and knowledge developed within your groups.

See the separate document on Assignment 2 for more details.