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Engineering Project Management and Ethics

Critique of Apple's Flat Structure

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1 MAIN ARTICAL

How Apple, one of the richest companies in the world, survive such a long time and create fascinating products which is satisfied by the public and some of them even changed the industry? What kind of structure does Apple operate in, what kind of culture does Apple have?

It is a point of view that Apple operates like a startup which is different from most of the large corporations in the world. Adam Lashinsky says Apple behave more like a cutting-edge startup than the consumer-electronics behemoth it is [1]. The CEO of this company has the highest power, which makes every critical decision. There is no committee in this company, it only has a chief financial officer, who is responsible for the costs and expenses that lead to profits or losses. This make Apple become a compact but not simple organization with extremely streamlined institutions. Apple has a ring-like structure, shown in Figure-1, with the CEO as its center, vice-presidents connected to it, and employees working directly with vice-presidents. Therefore, the company has a strong communication efficiency, information can be quickly conveyed, the company has an amazing response speed. Apple also has a strong culture of responsibility. For each of the project, there will be a directly responsible individual who is in charge of it, this makes the company well organized[2]. Apple also has many cultures like startups. For instances, Apple always Focus on a few things and be perfect, sometimes Apple let some small groups work with essential projects and it will hold the top 100 employs meeting to which makes the company even more 'flat' as compare with startup.

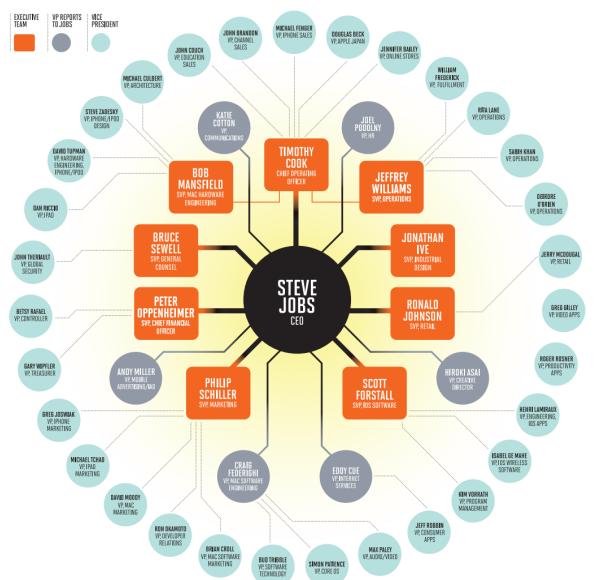


Figure 1: Ring-like structure from Apple [1]

So if Apples's structure really flat is remain a problem. To solve this problem, I find what is a really flat structure: Usually, it has no levels of middle management between staff and executives[3]. For Apple, that's not the case. Bolander says: The process and structure is the complete opposite from how a flat organization works[4]. However, Apple has a perfect hierarchy and structure. it has its own special struct and process and it's unrealistic for every low-level employee to get a direct response from the top management[1]. Different from startups, it is important for big companies to stick to decisions[4], which is different from what happened in Apple. Thus we can hardly say that Apple has a real flat structure. Apple is a big company still remain the culture and spirit of a startup, which use its unique and mature ring-like (or Pyramid-like) structure to guarantee these culture.

Although there are also some problems in Apple's ring-like structure, it has brought the company brilliance. It bring the vitality and efficiency to this giant company. Whether this system is better or worse than the traditional structure is still a mystery and wait for testing by time. Especially after the death of Jobs, Apple's structure will undergo more and more severe challenges.

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