Gabriel Jones: Shit or Get Off the Pot

Gabriel Jones found himself at a crossroads as he struggled with his position of producer at THQ. The software company had been transformed from a small team into a well-structured corporate operation. Many managerial changes took place which all had an impact on the corporation and its employees such as a change of the corporate strategy (from cheaply sprucing up older titles to the creation of their own original games), a shift to higher-risk investments (again, the much riskier endeavor of creating their own original games), and the implementation of systematic innovation and creation (instead of the reliance on spontaneous innovation). A large part of this transformation process included changing the culture of the company. If employees found that they couldn't adapt to the new changes, they either quit or were removed and this is exactly the position that Jones found himself in. The managerial changes this paper will focus on which led to Gabriel Jones's harrowing experience in the company were the rapid change in the corporate culture and structure. These changes were causing a divide within himself, forcing him to grow with the company which would greatly impact his attitude and behavior, the type of work he would need to perform, and force him to surrender to the new corporate culture and structure.

With regards to his attitude and behavior, Jones was an important contributor at THQ. He had a great amount of self-confidence and was an excellent organizational citizen: he knew that he had great potential, he knew that the company relied on his work, and he constantly went the extra mile to ensure a project's success, "He worked so hard that his eyes would start to play tricks on him. He learned the business by working in the trenches, and he studied other games to learn how to "break," or solve, them" (Dorsey 3). Jones was a valuable team player but it seems that his perception of the corporate changes caused a cognitive dissonance (D&M 402); he was torn between continuing to do what he loved– working in the trenches with little room for growth (and almost certainly with another company), or maturing– assuming more responsibility and taking on the new roles required of a producer in a Postmodern industry. Management at THQ gave Jones the opportunity to step into the role they wanted for him through the challenging task of completing the Aidyn Chronicles in Vancouver. I believe that Jones truly wanted to succeed and could have stepped up to the plate to become a great producer or more, but his personality kept him from making the leap.

Another area of conflict that Jones experienced was a change in the expected duties he was to perform. Jones was a high school dropout and most likely developed his skills from playing and testing video games. He didn't embody the image of the Postmodern video game producer and lacked the skills that it required: "People who grew up in video arcades and who started as testers aren't the right people to be producers anymore. A producer needs to be articulate and polished, because it's a pivotal, extremely key role" (Dorsey 13). Jones not only resisted the new expectations of producers, but also resisted the new rules of the company. Before the corporate metamorphosis, THQ was more loosely run, under its CEO Brian Ferrell, like a family operation with informal rules and informal communication. With the arrival of Jeff Lapin as vice chairman, the changes rolled in very quickly. These two leaders seemed to be opposites and successfully played a "good cop, bad cop" routine. According to Ferrell, "the single most important thing for a company like ours is to marry the creative side with the business side" (Dorsey 3). Where Ferrell was the warm heart of the creative side, Lapin was the cold brains of the business side. Gabriel Jones was much more aligned with Ferrell and his leadership style and had a hard time adjusting to Lapin's seemingly regimented changes.

A rapid transformation of the corporation's structure and culture was another hang up for Jones. Farrell and Lapin recognized that in order for THQ to grow, new systems and more controls needed to be implemented. In short, the company needed to develop a formal organization structure which includes "the set of formal tasks assigned to individuals and departments; formal reporting relationships, including lines of authority, decision responsibility, number of hierarchical levels, and span of managers' control; and the design of systems to ensure effective coordination of employees across departments" (D&M 246). With the implementation of this new structure came a major shift in the culture, leading to a resistance to change. Although some employees struggled through the growing pains and made the personal surrender to trust the company's leadership, such as Germaine Gioia, others had a hard time adjusting like Jones. Much of this trust was allowing work specialization to be introduced which consists of parting with old, familiar ways of spreading tasks over a broad area and instead focusing on the things they do best. These changes proved to be successful and led to higher quality and faster work but it would come at a price: losing an integral part of the creative talent.

In the end Jones decided to get off the pot– he left THQ and decided to work instead for yet another fledgling company. This decision was probably easier for him to handle as it would put him in a position which would feel more familiar and safe. The inner drive for him to mature and fully succeed still exists, however, as he explains, "someday, I'm going to be running one of these companies... It took me five years to know what I know today. I can make sacrifices that others aren't willing to make... I can put aside my craving to do the creative, artistic work myself" (Dorsey 15). He still wants to accomplish great things, but they will be on his terms.