IBM's Breakup Averted

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While most once-mighty international corporations are hopelessly disintegrating in the face of world-wide civil war, IBM may be bucking this trend, thanks to new communications technology developed in Europe.

Like other formerly successful global companies, IBM operated through distributed decision-making with offices throughout the world. A little-recognized underpinning of multinational corporations, however, was that smooth operations depended critically on regular face-to-face meetings between executives to work out differences, and maintain working relationships.

Now that travel has been impossible for several years, and with no end in site to the civil wars raging in Saudi Arabia, Russia, and the Middle-East, this dependence on face-to-face meetings has slowly become painfully apparent, as one multinational company after another cannot resolve its internal conflicts.

Just like our political leaders worldwide, today's business leaders are finding it impossible to hold organizations together without in-person meetings for persuasion, mediation, and conflict resolution. High-definition video conferencing is widely used, of course, but is not enough to prevent the "us-vs-them" mindset from poisoning companies once their leadership has been physically apart for more than two or three years.

IBM, on the other hand, may be avoiding this seemingly inevitable fate, thanks to the recently developed Amicable system that it has inserted into all its communication systems – both internal and external.

Employees continue to use high-definition video conferences and shared reality spaces as usual, along with old-fashioned video, voice, email, phone calls, presence-based IM, and web browsing, but Amicable continuously monitors and augments all these communication flows as they happen.

"With full access to all communications of the company," said IBM CTO Sarah Favre, "Amicable is able to detect emerging conflicts before they become irresolvable." The system suggests adding (and removing) people as needed, to keep important decisions and projects on track, and it works in conjunction with the latest conferencing systems to assist with mediation and conflict resolution.

Through pattern recognition on continuous streams of media, text, and social networks, Amical is able to detect potential problems in remote corners of the company, and make suggestions for appropriate people to ask questions or hold a meeting. It even suggests appropriate agendas for these meetings, and provides the necessary background materials. As people communicate, the system helps everyone stay aware of what they need to know, as well as what they can safely ignore. It enables everyone to be well-informed of how they are perceived by others in the organization, and how they may be helping or hurting the projects they work on.

"We have had such internal success with this system," says Favre, "that we have started selling it to many of our biggest customers. The communist party of China has begun installing it throughout its cantons and villages."

After helping to save IBM, could Amicable technology avert the looming civil war in China?