The following is a brief example of a simulation technique commonly referred to as an “In Basket Exercise.” Variations of this technique are used widely to illustrate the problem of managerial decision-making. You are to respond as if it were your decision to make in each case, not how you think a manager might respond in a real-life situation. Time is a factor. This simulation will end after 45 minutes.

Setting:

As an employee of the Pharmagen Corporation, you have worked your way up to the position of Information Technology Director, and have finally taken some well-earned vacation time. When you get back from your two weeks in Hawaii, the first thing you do is check your computer, mailbox, and voice mail for all missed messages while you were out. There are quite a few of each, from varying patrons and vendors, and now you need to act on these to return the department to speed on all issues.

Here are some facts about your situation. The Pharmagen Corporation is a large, multinational pharmaceutical company that specializes in targeted drug delivery through genetics research as well as drug development. As the Director of the Information Technology department, you and your staff are responsible for satisfactorily answering questions for all researchers, technicians, negotiating with vendors for all useful databases, and maintaining relations with the different research, business, and administrative branches of the company in your physical location. You report to the Director of Information Services, Mr. Robert Flay (tech support and the library are also under this director). Three permanent staff members report to you: Jennifer, Ben and Ann. They share the tasks of the department.
The ability to prioritize is a vital part of any managerial position. For this exercise, pretend that you have sole responsibility for all of the decisions presented, and that results will be expected within a reasonable time frame for all requests. Delegation is allowed to any of your three other staff members, although a brief reply to the customer is required for each item, regardless of a delegated or delayed action.

As in so many managerial activities, time is a factor. This simulation will end after 45 minutes.

The organization chart of the company is below:
Here are the objects found in various communication mediums. It is now October 15, and you left before receiving any of these.

1 – Memo

The Pharmagen Corporation
Office of the Vice President, Administration

From: S.C. Chase
To: All Department heads
Subject: Projection of space requirements, 200x-20xx

Date: October 1, 20xx

During the past few years, we have had a number of relocations of departments in the building, but our space needs continue to change as our organization grows. In an attempt to plan for space needs in the upcoming years, we are asking all departments to submit their anticipated need for space for the next five years. Would you review your department's need and let me know by October 20. Thank you.

2 – e-mail

From: Bob Flay
To: Sandy DeFillippo
Subject: It's that time again

Date: 10/10/03 10:25 am
Hi Sandy,

I hope your vacation was enjoyable. You've worked hard enough to deserve it! When you get back, however, it's time for quarterly performance reviews again. Please obtain the forms through the administration office when you're back in town, and have them prepared by November 1 to hand in to me.

Thanks,
Bob

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3 – voicemail, Oct. 05, 2003

Um, hi Sandy. This is Jennifer. I know that we haven't had much of a chance to talk lately, and I'm off the day you get back, but I've had some...changes that I think we need to discuss when you get back from vacation. Oh, all right, I'll tell you. I'm pregnant! I'm only about 3 months along now, but I'd like to discuss maternity leave and other considerations that may come along with you. Give me a call back, or come to my office when you get a chance and we can talk. See you soon. Bye!

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4 - email

From: John Brown
To: Sandy DeFillippo
Subject: Request for training

Date: 10/1/03

Dear Sandy:
As the recently appointed Director of Laboratory Research Services, I have noticed a lack of expertise in the researchers' and technicians' abilities with regard to their ability to deal with computer problems.
While some do turn to the IT Department to handle the problems for them, some problems have arisen from waiting for IT staff delayed on other projects in the past. If you could schedule a few sessions within the next month to train the bulk of the laboratory staff, I would greatly appreciate it. Just contact me when you have the details.

Sincerely,

John Brown
Director of Laboratory Research Services
188 West Wing
Pharmgen Corporation
100 Pharmacy Drive
Chapel Hill, NC 27514

5 – letter in mailbox

Dear Sir or Madam;

I am a recent college graduate with a degree in Computer Science, and am searching for a position in the pharmaceutical industry. I have a several assorted Microsoft certifications, including network security.

Although there are no job openings currently posted, I was hoping to place my resume on file with you in the eventuality that one does become available. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Brad Koenig
6 – voicemail, Oct. 5, 2003

Hi, Sandy, this is Rebecca McGrath in Marketing. One of my staff visited the IT department about a week ago to obtain some assistance with the computers in our department. To make a long story short, the problem ended up taking much longer than it should have and our department was without several computers for three days! This is a total waste of time and money that should not have been necessary. Please get back to me as soon as possible to discuss what we can do about not having a repeat of this poor performance.

7 – e-mail

From: Neil Rosenbaum
To: Sandy DeFillippo
Subject: Wonderful!

Date: 10/2/03

Hi Sandy,

I'm one of the oncology researchers here and I just wanted to relay my compliments on the IT department's work. I had a particularly thorny problem with a genetic sequence I was working on and needed quite a bit of assistance in obtaining the necessary computer memory, and in using the new software your department purchased for me. I was quite impressed by the wonderful personal help I received in doing my research. You're doing a great job; keep it up!

Sincerely,

Neil Rosenbaum
8 – voicemail 10/03/03

Hi Sandy, it’s Ben. I’m doing my best with the system-wide upgrades here, but I’m getting a respectable backlog despite using all of the hours I’m not directly helping the researchers. Would it be possible to get some help here, temporary sure, but permanent hopefully, so I can at least get caught up? Talk to you soon.

9, 10 – memo and e-mail

From: Sheila Connor
To: All Directors
Subject: Monthly Meeting

Date: 10/05/03

I am writing to remind you all of our monthly directors meeting that is occurring, as always, on the 15th of the month. Please respond with action items for the agenda before Oct. 10 th . Thank you and I will see you on the 15th.

Sincerely,

Sheila Connor
CEO – Pharmagen Corporation
100 Pharmacy Drive
Chapel Hill, NC 27514
11 – voicemail 10/11/03

Hi Sandy, it’s Ben again. I just ran into Mark from Sales in the hallway and he gave me a heads up. Apparently, the new plan from the top is to have “open houses” and do cross-training between departments. Should we start setting something tentative up so we can present something at least? Hope your vacation was good. Give me a call back when you get in. Thanks!

12 – e-mail

From: Robert Flay  
To: Sandy DeFillippo  
Subject: Budgets

Date: 10/12/03

Hi Sandy,

Third quarter numbers have just come in and Information Services is going to have to cut by about 5% this year. This was the lowest cut I could get, but I know it’s difficult with the staff’s salaries. Work up a tentative budget and we can talk about where the money will come from. Please have it ready for a meeting on 10/20. Thanks.

Bob

13 – Memo

From: Sheila Connor  
To: All Directors
Subject: EPA Visit

Date: 10/14/03

To all directors:

The Environmental Protection Agency has scheduled a visit for November 1, 2003. Please have all departments prepared and pass word among the staff. No violations of code will be tolerated. Thank you.

Sheila Connor
CEO – Pharmagen Corporation
100 Pharmacy Drive
Chapel Hill, NC 27514

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14 – voicemail 10/02/03

Hi Sandy, this is Ann. I know you're away right now, but I was hoping to take some comp time that I have coming to me. My husband and I need a few days away. When you get back, we can work out the details. Bye.

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15 – e-mail

From: Jan Stevenson
To: Sandy DeFillippo
Subject: Payments

Date: 10/13/03

Hi Sandy,
We've have a few problems here in Accounts Payable with your bills. We're unable to process anything until we get the new account number for the IT department's budget, and we need copies of each of the bills for filing histories. Until we get these things, we're frozen on payments to any of the vendors. Thanks for replying promptly.

Jan

16 – e-mail

From: Robert Flay
To: Sandy DeFillippo
Subject:

Date: 10/13/03

Hi Sandy,

I was out of town last week when you sent me an email about the patch for the new virus, and none of my staff received a copy. Consequently we did not perform the required updates, and now a couple of our computers are acting strangely. Could you send someone over here ASAP to fix this?

Bob

17 – letter in mailbox

Dell Computers
10/10/03

Dell Corporate Headquarters:
One Dell Way
Round Rock, Texas 78682

Dear Dell Customer,

Your account (83992848) is currently two months overdue. Unless we receive payment for a minimum of $12,500 with in the next two weeks, we will be forced to send your account to a collection agency. If that does not produce results, we will be forced to take legal action. Please respond as soon as possible to avoid further difficulties and cessation of services.

Sincerely,

Joanna Mecklen

18 – 10/13/03 Voicemail

Hi Sandy, this is Jennifer. Morning sickness has really been getting to me, so instead of coming in at 8:30 every morning I'm usually here around 10:00, and making up the time in the evening. I've cleared it with Ben and Ann, but was hoping you would ok it until I'm feeling better. Thanks.