



WILLIAMS ALLIANCE
INTERNATIONAL

Observations & Advisories

October 7, 2003
Volume No.1
Issue No.1

A Forum on Service Process Optimization,
Change and Management

A Williams Alliance Publication – www.williamsalliance.com

#1 in a series

Ten Basic Revisionist Thoughts on Effective Process-Based Change: #1: First, prepare to communicate the objective

... (in a change effort) very few employees really understand what management is talking about...

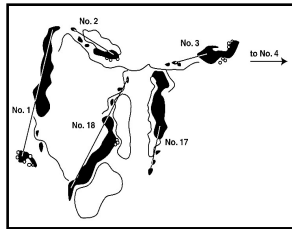
One of the most difficult learnings for senior management when launching major change efforts is that very few employees understand what they mean.

“Becoming the low production cost leader” may make sense to senior management, but for most everyone else it can mean little to nothing. An objective has to be put in terms of their day-to-day work. How will it affect them? How does it benefit them? If information isn’t delivered to fill this gap, it will be made up; if it has to be made up, it will be negative.

First, don’t invent something new. Use existing channels to get the information out. In times of change people revert to information sources that they are used to and trust (usually supervisors and leads for first line employees). Little creates more cynicism and less acceptance than a brand new video tape or newsletter created to explain something that is supposed to be important. The bigger the news, the more important it is to use existing channels. *Find out what those channels are and use them. If they don’t work well, improve on them.*

Case Study: Blue Mountain Resort Golf Slow-play

Blue Mountain, a four-season resort situated due north of Toronto, is Ontario’s largest and busiest mountain resort



“We chose slow play because that was the number one cause of customer dissatisfaction with our course. We tackled the issue by studying the course, the way golfers move through it and the amount of time it took them to move from one hole to the next. We tackled holes where play was taking the longest over expected time.”

A cross-functional team was launched made up of mid-level managers and senior employees from each department that effected play- through time. Groups that were used to working independently were now expected to act as a team, to understand the customers’ experience in playing golf on their course, and to improve on their level of satisfaction with that experience.

“The effort has been a combination of changing staff perspective, but changes to the process itself have given us, all of us, the greatest gains. And the role of the cross-functional team, getting the different groups that work with the golf course to realize that it is going to take a team like this to really make this golf course work, pro-shop, outside staff, player support, maintenance, everybody.

Sometimes the process is people moving through your operation

“We were successful; the proportion of people who say that slow play is the number one dissatisfaction item dropped, leveled off and then stayed stable. Satisfaction is improving; mainly that we are getting a lot of customer compliments and our business is way up, over 60% in the last three years, from 24,000 to about 35,000 rounds of golf per season.

“Now even on my worst day, even the toughest, things are manageable”

“Now even on my worst day, even the toughest, things are manageable. We discovered that it took a cross-functional approach to really manage play. The Team developed ‘the system’ and the staff believes in it. It has become routine.

Team Leader
Director, Golf and Tennis
Blue Mountain Resort

Excerpted from William, D., *Mining the Middle Ground: Developing Mid-level Managers for Strategic Change*, St.Lucie Press, Boca Raton,, 2001, p. 107



Counter Advisories: Contrary thoughts on common advice

Quick thought: Knowledge is power – but sharing it is where successful change really begins

Knowledge is only created by individuals, from individual experience and reaction. But for an organization to gain full value from that knowledge, it must be moved from the tacit form in which it is created to an explicit form in which it can be communicated and learned by others and then built upon.

- **Tacit knowledge:**

individual, experience based, context specific. Hard to communicate.

- **Explicit knowledge:** *group based, documented and communicatable.*

Improvement requires understanding the process. However it is not enough for one person to understand; knowledge must be shared to gain full benefits. Developing a shared understanding is best done with objective, factual based information.

Common advice for choosing a process improvement project team:

“Choose representatives from all stakeholder groups, customers as well as employees from all levels in the organization”.

Sounds good on paper but following this advice will create three major problems (which you really don't need in a project):

1. customer input is important but there is a big difference between getting input and putting them on a team. Putting them on a team will supply a lot of not necessarily accurate or reliable data, slow down the project, and publicize a lot of internal information you would rather keep internal. When a customer takes the time to be on a team they expect to be listened to, whether or not their opinion is representative or accurate. Well done surveys and focus groups will deliver far better results.
2. managers and employees from all levels put on the same team will have major communication problems. Differences in contexts of knowledge, priorities, and issues are often too great to overcome in the relatively short time a project team is working together.
3. stakeholder input is, again, very important but putting representatives on a working team is going to create more problems than good feelings.

Advisory:

The first priority must be to meet the objective; there are other, more effective ways to improve customer relations, get their input, develop problem managers or employees, or assure stakeholders.

- Create an “auxiliary” team for extra-ordinary representatives; use it to advise and to give input, but leave the project team to the internal experts that will get the work done.
- Select team members based on the improvement objective and expertise on the process to be improved: as it is now, how it must be, and what is going to be involved in getting there (if that is already decided).

Reworking or working around a poorly designed team can slow down or wreck a process improvement effort. Use common sense, consider the objective, and pick carefully.

Welcome to the first edition of WAI Observations and Advisories; a monthly forum for the exchange of information and professional opinions about process-based change execution. Our intended audience for this forum is managers and change agents who have to cope with the day-to-day challenge of accomplishing major change objective in their organizations. Our goal is to present a mix of ideas and perspectives; to challenge some common held ones; always with an emphasis on making process based change projects work in the real-world work place. This is a broad field; articles will range from setting goals to the details of statistical process control and six sigma. We hope that, in all cases, right or sometimes wrong, that you will find reading this release to be thought provoking, informative, and interesting. We invite your input.

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