

Introduction

Consider the following business situation. A successful contract manufacturing organization recently experiences a major setback in its drive for customer satisfaction. Many factors contributed to this and the result is an unacceptable rating (56 out of 100) by one of its two major customers and the removal from the customer's quote list. Coupled with this, a second customer's delivery requirements tripled necessitating the implementation of a seven-day, 24-hours/day schedule, utilizing young and inexperienced workers. Finally, the existing plant manager resigns. What we had here is a disaster in the making.

With the appointment of a new plant manager, the establishment of customer-oriented micro-factories, and the charter to improve the customer's perception, the new management team was formed. The management team was free to develop their own quantitative measures and annual objectives with the overall goal of assuring operating profits were achieved.

In many cases like this, it is difficult for a group of well-intentioned managers to show well-intentioned production people how to perform the required tasks successfully and to function as a team when this has not been the normal mode of operation. What happens, therefore, is a classical case of a "fire drill." The production workers are unclear who to take direction from and who is the most knowledgeable. The management team adds to the confusion because they give conflicting signals. The bottom line is that there is no teamwork, no production -just mass confusion.

It is easy to analyze this situation if you are viewing it from the outside. The problem, however, is to understand what is occurring when you are in the middle of it. You feel pressures from all sources to do something and your innate desire is to do the right thing, but you do not know where to start. What is missing?

First, no team becomes a team without the members consciously taking the steps to make it happen. Think of any organization that you view as a team. What makes it a team? All teams have some purpose for becoming a team. This can be something as clear as creating a plan to be undefeated or as abstract as a plan preventing opponents from scoring touchdowns for the season. This is typically expressed in terms of a CHARTER. Writing a charter helps each member of the team obtain a crystal-clear view of the purpose of the team and "buy-into" the purpose or goal of the team. It also can be used to set the ground rules for behavior and interaction.

Just, because a group of people call themselves a team and have a stated purpose or charter does not always make them function as a team. There are some basics to this

thing called teamwork, and unfortunately; it's not always common sense. To progress in the journey to a successful team, some basic training in teamwork and team interaction may be needed.

Finally, after all of the activity stated above is completed, there needs to be a process by which a team assesses its performance and strives for improvement. This also seems so basic but how many organizations do you know just try to make improvements by working harder and praying. Driving improvements must be a structured, formalized part of a team or it will remain static. Evidence supporting this is available in hundreds of case studies from the 1980's. Company after company jumped on the quality circle train, the SPC bandwagon, etc., hoping things would improve without a structured process to assess the status of improvements.

Today, we have answers to all the problems posed above. A team must go through:

1. developing pains in the formation of its purpose or charter to explicitly state it for all members to understand and agree to it,
2. training how to function as a team with tools like consensus decision-making, human interaction, management, leadership, etc., and
3. assessing the performance through a functioning Management by Objective/Management Review process and driving improvement through effective Team Oriented Problem Solving.

Only with the above "under their belt," can a team of managers lead a facility to the goal of become "world class" and continued profitability.

This article will presents a guide for a splintered group of managers to be transformed into a uniformed, focused team driving improvements in all areas of the business. It is a four phased approach as follows:

- **Phase 1 Creating the Team** including reaching a basic understanding of what a team is and the common vision you are trying to create.
- **Phase 2 Creating a Plan** to achieve the common vision of what the team wants to become.
- **Phase 3 Establishing the Process** to for management and feedback fostering teamwork and improvements.
- **Phase 4 Fostering an environment** where continued challenges and successes are built around team work and positive recognition. This is a team capable of sustaining itself on its own energy.

PHASE 1. CREATING THE VISION

Anybody who analyzes teams in the sports world or the business world can understand what makes a team successful. Many managers of either sport or business teams

assume that this is so obvious a question that they ignore the importance of reviewing it with the team. This is an especially important exercise for a young or newly formed team to conduct because it takes away any guesses or assumptions.

So, what makes a team successful? Listed below are some of the KEY ingredients:

1. The mission/charter is understood by all
2. The roles/responsibilities are defined
3. Ground rules for behavior have been established,
4. There is a clear vision, i.e., to become world champs
5. Group decision-making is practiced
6. Communication methods are defined/proven & effective

As we proceed with Phase 1, a "team" meeting was used to help define and clarify the elements of successful teams and to gain agreement and ownership from each of the team members.

This activity should be accomplished via an off-site meeting with the following agenda and objectives:

1. Conduct a new manager assimilation for the new plant manager
2. Work through the "key ingredients listed earlier, and
3. Establish the objectives for the management team for the next twelve months.

The team next completes and documents a common definition of the word team. By defining what a team is in their own words and relating back to the elements that make teams successful, they've set the stage for the charter development. Next, what is the charter of this management team? Several immediate thoughts can come to mind such as make a profit, grow revenue, customer satisfaction, etc. These are all so obvious and, in reality, should occur with the right work force whether the management team contributes or detracts from the effort. The management team, however, is really chartered with creating a culture to allow for total customer satisfaction and revenue growth to occur. An example of a typical charter is as follows:

"To build a continuous improvement/data driven management process by creating a culture that focuses on the important, not urgent activities."

Let's analyze this statement. First the charter states it is committed to always driving for improvement through the use of data and a feedback process. This states they are trying to get away from MBGF (Management by Gut Feel). Next, the charter states that it is the management team's responsibility to create and foster the environment or culture of the

plant. Finally, it states that they want to focus on the important, not urgent activities. This relates directly to Stephen Covey's works, most recently First Things First (1994, 37) which basically states that the planning portion of our day needs to become more dominant than the "fire fighting" portion of our days. Try this test for yourself. Track how you spend your day and categorize the time into the following four categories:

Quadrant 1	Important & Urgent	Customer Complaint, Line Down, Medical Emergency
Quadrant 2	Important, Not Urgent	Planning Business or Personal Strategies
Quadrant 3	Urgent, Not Important	Someone wants your time, Artificial Deadlines
Quadrant 4	Not Urgent, Not Important	Channel Surfing at 11:00 PM

Once the charter is defined and agreed upon, an obvious question asked is what are the factors preventing us from fulfilling the charter? In other words, what is keeping us from being successful? It is noteworthy to state all such items even those that the team believes they have no control over such as "help from corporate." These will constitute potential weaknesses or liabilities will have to be dealt with later so be prepared to identify them up-front.

Other items which may be classified as inhibitors are:

- a. unclear objectives
- b. conflicting objectives
- c. confusion about roles and responsibilities
- d. confusion about measurements and progress
- e. who's in charge
- f. lack of skills, competency, trust, etc.

As this list develops, it will become clear to all why this team is taking the time to go through these basic steps in the formation of the team. Most of these "inhibitors" will be within the control of the team and plans to overcome these have to be developed.

The next step in developing a cohesive team is to explicitly define some basic elements of human interaction. All too often the basic values and beliefs we hold dear in a social

setting are forgotten in business. Each member of our team has a unique contribution to make to the team’s success. Take a moment and discuss the respective roles and responsibilities. As an example, let’s assume our team believes in the following roles:

Plant Manager	"My role is that of a coach. To facilitate the development of a general game plan and to provide insights and guidance how to execute it better."
Production Manager	"My job is to make the product This includes training the people, putting in the controls, and keeping the plant running."
Materials Manager	"My job is to assure the production manager has a schedule and the materials needed to make the products scheduled."
Quality Manager	"My role is a problem solving facilitator. I will help guide and perform root cause analysis on internal or external problems. In addition, I will provide training in basic quality skills."

Again, this may appear to be so elementary and basic that it is not necessary. Let's suppose, however, that our production manager is an old-timer. He believes his job is to make product (hopefully good product) but it is the quality manager's job to check and assure that it is good. If this open discussion about roles and responsibilities were not conducted, several conflicts would subsequently ensue as production "ramps-up" and product is shipped.

As part of this discussion, the team should also define how they intend to operate as a team. This includes such items as:

- communication channels (types of meetings, frequency, time, attendees, etc)
- commitments of confidentiality
- routine reports, etc

All these items will ultimately be accomplished either through explicit discussions or evolved over time. Defining the process how the team interacts up-front will enable the team to progress from the formation stages to the performing stages quicker.

All teams, no matter what field, business, or sport they are in, progress through four stages of development. These stages are:

FORMING, STORMING, NORMING, and PERFORMING

The above steps, i.e. team definition, charter, roles/responsibilities, and operating ground rules will help expedite the team through these stages. Let me explain these stages in more detail.

FORMING

The team has been formed and now they have to understand their interrelationships, personalities, etc. Think of this stage as a baseball team getting together for the first time at spring training unsure of who are the players, who has the ball, where do they play, and if we have a designated hitter or not. This stage is usually the quickest to complete since it requires only a series of questions to be answered and understand. Some of these questions should also include the proverbial, "who's on first?"

STORMING

Some teams never progress from this stage. Think of any baseball team where the owner(s) has bought as many super-stars as possible and hopes to win the world series. Here is a classical case where the egos impact the performance. How do you progress through this stage? Assuming the definition, charter, roles, & ground rules have been defined, the remaining way to transition the storming stage is through basic team training. I am defining team training as empathic listening skills, coaching methods, brainstorming, Team Oriented Problem Solving, consensus decision making, and other various "experiential" team-work exercises. This provides the members of the team common experiences with practical guidance on what it means to operate as a team. This is not common sense. These are skills that have to be learned and reinforced by the team members.

NORMING

Once all the basics are accomplished, most teams pass through the "norming" stage. This is where the mistrust or conflicts present up-to-now are put to rest and things start to happen smoothly. Note the team is not performing up to the potential yet, but the basic operation of the team is accomplished even though they do not win each game.

PERFORMING

This relates to the typical dynasty label of the Yankees. The members complement each other well by supporting their respective weaknesses and building on their respective strengths. Teams in business who have reached this level do not allow challenges to cause negative thinking but rather they regroup and plan the last minute comeback. These teams have reached new levels of performance.

For teams at all levels to successfully navigate these four stages requires constant management attention. The teams need to be given the latitude to make this transition

themselves rather than externally influenced. A “get it in gear or else” pep talk will not be an effective tool.

The last task for a team in Phase 1 is to communicate what has been accomplished to the organization. In the case I am using, i.e., a new plant management team, this activity must be communicated to the rest of the plant. This is as important a task as any covered so far. The remainder of the plant is looking to the management team for direction and leadership. What has been accomplished demonstrates the kind of leadership necessary in today’s business world. The rollout of this information to the plant population needs to be well-planned, deliberate, and fully deployed. Many companies have failed in their attempts to change to a team-based organization by just creating a poster and putting it on the wall. As the management team, or should I say leadership team, your mission is to set the entire tone of operations for the facility. If you were successful in developing the true team spirit required, it is equally your responsibility to demonstrate it, facilitate it, and encourage it throughout the organization. Posters on the wall alone do nothing to deploy teamwork. It has to become part of the day-to-day activities and dialog. Do not overlook this important part.

PHASE 2 -THE PLAN TO ACHIEVE THE VISION

Once the management team has been through the basic building-blocks described in Phase 1, the next step required is to develop the plan to move from the current state of operation to the conceptual or visionary state. Since a clear description of what this means is required to have a common vision, a brainstorming session will help clarify this followed by a session to define "how we get there."

At this time the management team takes on parallel roles. First, there is the management of the day- to-day activities. This can become overwhelming and easily become the total focus.

Here, is when the team needs to continually reflect on its charter which was,

"To build a continuous improvement/data driven management process by creating a culture that focuses on the important, not urgent activities."

The day-to-day activities are definitely "urgent and important" but it is necessary to do the planning activities in order to move to the desired state of business.

To successfully accomplish the management team in question use the following approach:

1. Defined a sub-group of the management team to function as a steering committee but call it the" Continuous Improvement Leadership Team" (CILT). (I don't know anybody who likes the term steering committee. If you don't like what you are

called, you won't make it successful). This group is chartered to identify those tasks/projects which will facilitate the transformation of the company or facility to the desired, visionary state. In addition, the CILT should address those inhibitors identified during the Phase 1 activity and implement a plan to overcome them.

2. Explicitly defined the management process to handle the day-to-day issues and activity. Included in the management process are such things like:
 - a. Regularly scheduled meetings, their purpose, agenda, & desired outcome
 - b. Other communication channels, such as monthly reports, etc.
 - c. The implementation of items planned by the CILT. (How is the team going to plan & track progress to that plan).
 - d. Process for understanding and answering the question, "Are we making progress toward our goal?" Here is where the Management Review Process becomes the cornerstone of the entire functioning of the team.

3. Finally, as all the pieces are identified to encompass both the strategic and tactical objectives, implementation becomes critical to the success of the organization. This can only be accomplished via each member of the team becoming a "champion" of some elements. By this "signing-up," individual managers and functions accept the overall responsibility for making it happen and reporting back to the leadership team on status.

The outcome of Phase 2 of the plan is the road map to transition successfully to the "visionary state." The outcome identifies all phases of the road map with an assigned Champion. These now becomes measureables that are reviewed during regularly schedules management review meetings, business reviews, functional staff meetings, and individual quarterly performance reviews. This approach provides each individual in the organization a clear picture of :

- a. Facility 1-2 year Strategic Objectives
- b. Facility Quarterly-Monthly Tactical Objectives
- c. Each Functions Annual Objectives
- d. Each Manager's Annual Objectives

PHASE 3 -FULL IMPLEMENTATION

All the plans listed above are not unique and original. They are, however, used sporadically by many organizations. What is unique to the approach demonstrated and discussed here is how the management team formed and communicated its intention to

the associates and used the Management Review process to tie the entire organization together providing a unified approach to improvement.

Once the items identified in Phase 2 are defined, Phase 3 starts with the kick-off of the Management Review process. For this description, the form.ft1 Management Review process is defined as "the assembly and analysis of existing data on key team measureables in a manner which is quickly reviewed and acted upon by the team." As we start this process, the management, or leadership team, needs to identify what are these key team measureables.

In addition, since we are attempting to make overall improvements in how we are performing, improvement objectives or goals need to be assigned to each of the process and driven by functional teams.

Finally, to successfully build the visionary organization defined, each of the key improvement initiatives or objectives shall be reported on by their champion at routine management reviews. This assures the time invested and plans developed building the team, defining the vision, stating and overcoming the inhibitors does not die on the shelf but instead becomes a living document that is integrated into the entire operation.

The team can now accomplish both the strategic and tactical activities of the business and fulfill the charter.

PHASE 4 -SELF-SUSTAINING

Once the basic elements of understanding, respect, interaction, and teamwork are defined and understood by all members, the team becomes a self-sustaining entity in of itself. A leadership team must reach this stage of development. Going through the detailed process of building the successful leadership team creates the strong foundation which will survive the troubled time ahead for all businesses. A strong leadership team with a defined management process will weather any storm or changes in the team members since all these processes are owned, followed, and believed in by the members.

CONCLUSIONS

Like all models, this is one to be reviewed and modified to fit specific needs. This model, however, has been utilized successfully with a high degree of success.

REFERENCES

Covey, S. R. 1994. *First Things First*. New York: Simon & Schuster