



Process Improvement Tools Accelerate Culture Change

By Bruce Timmcke, Senior Consultant- Bright Tree Consulting Group, LLC

The Key to Organizational Transformation

Everyone in business knows the story of Jack Welch, and how he transformed General Electric to be the model for business success. Welch took the reins at GE in 1981. By 1984, Welch declared that he had achieved 15% of what he intended to accomplish. Said Welch, "A company can boost productivity by restructuring, removing bureaucracy and downsizing, but it cannot sustain high productivity without cultural change."¹

What cultural change generally entails, for most organizations, is an increase in employee engagement against desired and specific business outcomes. It seeks to gain the hearts and minds of its work force, leveraging their increased commitment and investment to the company's success.

Jack Welch introduced Work Out™ in 1989 as the driver of his process improvement initiatives. This process would ultimately evolve into GE's full-fledged Six Sigma philosophy.

Work Out™ is a simple, yet hugely powerful concept. Get the people together who are closest to the work, to attack well defined and carefully scoped problems impacting their work operations. The group is carefully facilitated through a process of brainstorming causes and possible solutions, prioritizing the most viable fixes, and developing recommendations. This is typically done in an intense 2-3 day workshop.

The real power comes at the end of that session, at what is called the Town Hall meeting. A select group of business leaders assemble to hear the recommendations. The group includes the owner(s) of the work processes that were evaluated. Following each presented

recommendation, the leader renders a decision: either yes, no, or the team is asked to refine the recommendation (with additional research and refinement applied). As the teams were encouraged to favor solutions representing the best payback versus the most reasonable levels of effort/resources required, leadership teams find themselves approving most recommendations (generally 80+% of the recommendations). For approved recommendations, the teams are sanctioned to implement the action

plans that they developed for each recommendation. Actions are targeted to be completed within 60 days.

Imagine the impact of this approach! Employees, who for years may not have ever been asked their opinion, are now empowered to boldly go forward and implement solutions that they have developed. And the leadership's role is to clear obstacles and ensure their success. Work Out™ can create a quantum leap in engagement, definitely signaling that the organization has made a commitment to shift its culture.

Employees, who for years may not have ever been asked their opinion, are now empowered to boldly go forward and implement solutions that they have developed.

Why Work Out™ is so Effective

1. *Because the people closest to the work know it best.*

At one of Bright Tree's client organizations, shop floor employees dramatically reduced a chronic process breakdown which had been studied unsuccessfully by every internal expert over the past 30 years.

2. *It drives responsibility down to those who develop the solutions.*

Many improvement efforts stagnate because the work falls back on the leadership team to manage in addition to the plethora of other issues challenging the business. In Work Out™, extra hands are applied to the implementation; the leadership group supports, but doesn't constitute the "doers."

3. *It breaks down departmental or interfunctional walls.*

The best applications for Work Out™ are issues which span several areas. Team members from the various areas collaborate on the solutions and actions plans. The result is better understanding of each other's areas, and the building of improved working relationships.

4. *The Work Out™ process tools include strong action planning, clear assignments of responsibility, disciplined follow-up, and measurements that ensure the improvements are sustained.*

Like any other process, adherence to proper implementation

and follow-through is critical. The Work Out™ process utilizes the right tools to support this.

How to Implement Successfully

One of the keys to any cultural change initiative is to squelch skepticism. You can vehemently tell your employees that you want and need their involvement, but the proof is in the actions. You get one chance to do it right, so two features are critical in successfully launching Work Out™ in your organization.

1. Proper planning: Having the right projects, properly scoped to an appropriate and manageable level of challenge for the team, is critical

2. Expert facilitation: The success of the event depends heavily on the skillful guidance of trained facilitators. These facilitators are specially trained in the steps of the process, and adept at managing group dynamics.

And let's not forget, Work Out™ isn't just a great way to drive cultural change and increase the engagement of your employees. It can serve as the foundation for ever-expanding process improvement methodologies which can generate significant improvements in cost, throughput, quality, waste reduction, and customer service.

It is an investment with a fast and significant pay-back.

*You get one chance
to do it right, so
two features are
critical in successfully
launching Work Out™
in your organization.*



Bruce Timmecke is a Senior Consultant for Bright Tree Consulting Group, LLC. Learn more about how we can help you utilize process improvement tools to achieve organization objectives by visiting our website at www.brighttreeeg.com