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Keeping Score and Communicating Results

A visual workplace is a place that speaks for itself. It communicates what is happening in regards to the objectives of each working group and how that group is doing with those objectives. It clearly points out anything within its boundaries that is not adding value to the products being produced, and, if done correctly, answers any questions one could have about anything to do with that department or factory. It is also set up to display feedback as to where the organization stands in relationship to its vision and mission. It is the cornerstone to the use of self directed teams because it is centered on the principle of self-control.

Peter Drucker is often credited with coining the phrase "Management by Objectives" but he is seldom remembered for the complete concept he was referring to and that is Management by Objectives **and self control**. Self-control is a very powerful level of control and it is the driving principle behind the visual workplace. For self-control to work, there have to be effective and formal planning, execution, and feedback systems in place. These are aided by the visual workplace that provides feedback on the performance of those systems.

14 Opportunities for progress with a Visual Workplace

1. It discourages a launch instead of finish outlook
2. Concept preference rather than implementation
3. Technical fixes instead of people
4. Extrinsic motivation rather than recognition
5. Writing information versus oral
6. Lack of cross functional teams
7. Uncaptured organizational learning
8. Lack of meaningful benchmarking information
9. Emphasizes Scientific Method as basis for problem solving.
10. Deploys (Uses) the whole work force
11. Real customer & competitor data drive decisions
12. Hundreds do what few used to do
13. Makes invisible assets visible
14. Educates the workplace

Launch instead of finish

Many people establish a reputation for themselves as starters or launchers of new programs. They are remembered for their starts, but seldom for finishing anything. Sometimes careers can be built by the visibility of all these spectacular starts. The starters get promoted and someone else has to come in and pick up the pieces. The tracking methods and some of the tedious problem solving work in the visual workplace readily serve to curtail

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launches for launches sake. The smoke from the excitement of the launches becomes less exciting and the heat and light of the finishes become more apparent and important.

Concept preference rather than implementation

This is what you get when you have an individual or a group that is always coming up with ideas to fix things but nothing seems to ever get fixed. That is because they are strong on ideas and concepts but weak on implementation. When properly done, only the implementation gets measured and displayed. This helps stress the hard work that has to be done in actually implementing ideas.

Technical fixes instead of people

Some of the problem solving tools used in an action team approach and displayed on plant and department information boards can be very effective in displaying just how much can be accomplished with the resources already available to the group. This is in contrast to those with the bias that there are technical fixes to many problems that require only the investment in the correct technology. In the visual workplace, people are looked to first to fix things and to a lesser extent is the emphasis placed on technology.

Extrinsic motivation rather than recognition

Napoleon once observed that he could not pay men enough to endure the hardships of weather, cold, disease, starvation, and fatigue to be soldiers in his army but he noted they would be willing to risk their lives for a little piece of cloth displayed as a decoration on the front of their uniform. Those pieces of cloth or battlefield decorations show what truly motivates. What could be worth less to an individual than a small piece of cloth and what could be worth more to them than their lives, yet they will risk their lives for the recognition that goes with that bit of cloth. People will leave over the long run if there are perceived problems with their pay but they will not be motivated by it except for the short run. (The one exception to this is an incentive plan where the feedback as to earnings is occurring on an immediate basis.) The good communications practices of a visual workplace are a reservoir of recognition feedback.

Writing information versus oral

Very little or nothing at all is written down in a visual workplace. This preserves the freshness in information that often gets stale as it is reduced to writing and then translated orally again later on but without its original zip.

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Inadequate use of cross-functional teams

When activities are continually up and visual it becomes immediately apparent just how interdependent individual groups in a company can be. The use of cross functional teams to solve problems becomes the only way for their removal in many situations. This facet of organizational reality often remains hidden until highlighted visually.

Uncaptured organizational learning

Often we are amazed by what some individuals have in the way of knowledge as to what is going on. It is not until we ask the question that we appreciate just how much they know and can contribute. Everyone knows about the flashy outgoing individuals they run into all day long but few can reach those who are quiet and hard to understand. Since there are usually more of the latter there is more to be learned from reaching them and getting their input. In many cases it means determining what their secret knowledge is and how to develop and exploit it. The visual workplace helps discover and use this knowledge.

Lack of meaningful benchmarking information

This area requires a great deal of self-discipline. It takes a substantial will power to compare yourselves with the best in the breed in your business. It takes even more willpower to take the results of this type of comparison and publicly display the best results next to your results. When done right in a visual workplace, everyone immediately receives a clear picture of what has to be done to be equal to or better than the best. With that understanding, actions for improvement can start and the lectures and exhortations can stop. People know what they need to do and need not be wearied by anyone overstating the obvious.

Emphasizes the Scientific Method as the basis for problem solving

This is not an academic in charge of the business processes. It is the application of the methods routinely used in the scientific disciplines to understanding what customers want and translating those wants into company capabilities. Investigation, experimentation, and research are part of everyone's job. It should be done at least weekly and there should be public information as to the scope of what is being done and the status to date. There should also be information as to what will be done with the results of the research and what sort of additional research methods will be used. Start with simple problem solving until everyone is used to these methods, then move on to more complicated endeavors such as process improvement. No matter what step you are at though, make the progress visible.

Uses the entire workforce

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Imagine the situation in your company where the weakest employee you have possesses robust math and language skills. Now imagine all of those employees actively involved in solving and eliminating process problems. The visual workplace encourages self education for those who are weak and it encourages active participation with its prominently displayed information. This provides a motivation to get almost everyone involved in helping to make things better. This is much more effective than just using those who know the right people, have a college education, or are unabashedly ambitious. The work area becomes the teacher with everyone having the capability to learn from all the information that is so visible.

Real customer and competitor data drive decisions

There is now a need for daily data on customers and competitors. That data is immediately reviewed with everyone. Over time, most of the internal measures will evolve into measuring the affects of the groups activities. In most companies, that alone is quite a step when you consider all of the reports and bits of information that are generated that have nothing to do with customer satisfaction or competitive position. This all starts and is driven by the visual workplace and its need for meaningful data.

Hundreds do what few used to do

One of the developments here is a shortening of the time between an idea and its implementation. Since everyone becomes a doer without the usual reporting structure, there are fewer people to have to talk about ideas with. With that talking time removed, the implementation comes faster. Displaying this process visually helps focus on the implementation.

Makes invisible assets visible

In the visual workplace, this is the spark for those with the dull and everyday jobs. Their seemingly invisible work becomes apparent in an environment where people are seen because of their deeds and merit. There are some real surprises here as those without the social activities and networking opportunities that normally allow visibility can show what they have accomplished. This is in sharp contrast to those who want visibility from authority or rank and not from accomplishment skills that have to be re-demonstrated each year. A good visual workplace really sets the stage for the true performers and sends the politicians to their seats.

Educates the workplace

There is nothing stashed away in drawers any longer. Not only does the information itself educate, it drives the questions that drive the research that drives the education level even further.

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What counts can't be counted.....but much of it can be displayed

An immense challenge facing those in management and leadership capacities is getting a firm grasp on the status of those matters that really have weight in describing the true strengths of the company. These qualities defy the measurements of our traditional financial reporting systems yet are more critical to success than those traits that can be more easily quantified. The following are examples of components that are critical but cannot as of yet be easily measured. They are, however, quite evident to those who through experience and time have learned how to recognize them. A clear implication with this observation is the larger role that the judgment of seasoned leaders will play over the traditional operating measurements. Developing non-traditional measures and displaying their results clarifies these important areas.

- Learning
- Customer satisfaction
- Trust
- Group intelligence
- Openness
- Innovativeness
- Courage
- Confidence
- Genuine caring for customers and one another
- Vision
- Acceptability of a new design by the customer
- Intrinsic motivation, cooperation, and other human attributes that bring results
- Fundamental capability of a company to shape its future
- Systems thinking in the workplace
- Empowerment
- The quality with which a company implements quality
- Inspiration
- Expectations
- Passion
- Flexibility
- Collaboration
- Commitment
- Consensus