

Data Collection Frequency

A. QWLC Position Regarding Survey Data Collection Activity.

Integrating survey data collection and follow-through activity into the same rhythm as financial activity is essential to a reliable change effort. Financial data is collected and reported with the most consistent frequency: MONTHLY – QUARTERLY – ANNUALLY at a minimum. In large organizations HOURLY - SHIFT - DAILY - WEEKLY reporting are of equal importance. An organization's *Quality of WorkLife* is the single most important and always the first element in determining the profitability of an organization over the long-term yet its frequency is typically irregular. The *Quality of WorkLife Index* is the fundamental measurement that will determine if the organization is capable of fulfilling its purpose and missions, and achieving its vision.

B. A Typical Scenario for First-time Survey Users.

Once data is fed back to the organization, Teams are formed to deal with the issues that emerged in the survey results. The Teams often flounder for lack of specific training in "how to change an organization's cultural capacity - cultural performance." A dysfunctional belief that "If people knew better they'd do better!" leads leaders and managers to settle for training or informing the appropriate people with the expectation that improvements will be made. What really happens more often is that habits embedded in the culture quickly return the organization to the way it was before data collection efforts were initiated. Teams wither. Raised expectations fall - typically to a level below the baseline. When the time comes to conduct the annual checkup, responsible individuals often want to delay data collection because they believe survey results will be poor. Such delays are noticed. Last minute attempts to respond to old data are typically transparent to the workforce and mark another reason for a potential drop in scores.

We compare this scenario with individual health checkups. Any medical professional will suggest that checkups be conducted on an annual schedule. Few would give advice to delay taking the physical while last ditch efforts are made to lose weight, and correct a habitually poor diet. The annual checkup is used to measure progress AND discover any additional irregularities needing attention. The annual checkup is used to reset priorities.

C. The Nature of Periodic Activity.

It is essential that the survey processing frequency match the financial reporting cycle in order to share equally high credibility and feed into the decision-making processes with equal significance. With this synchronized "rhythm" in mind, the following schedule is recommended:

1. **ANNUALLY.** Whatever month initiates the collection of Baseline survey data ought to be the same month that annual checkups occur. At minimum, there ought to be visible activity (described below) surrounding the anniversary of the Baseline data collection effort with regard to the annual checkup.

2. QUARTERLY. No less frequently than once each calendar Quarter a “Metric” data collection effort ought to occur. The “Metric” collects abbreviated data from the organization in order to answer the question, “What progress are we making toward our strategic goals?”

3. MONTHLY. Several things ought to be scheduled and conducted/completed each month:

a. Team Activity. Every month, every team ought to meet. Team meetings ought to be marked by dialog that leads to a recommendation or decision within the scope covered by the team charter.

b. Workforce Report. Every month, the advancements of every team ought to be reported to every member of the organization. This can be completed as an individual publication, or as a "poster-type" presentation that is displayed in break rooms, newsletters, or next to time clocks at employee entrances.

4. WEEKLY or with SENIOR STAFF MEETING REGULARITY. Weekly or the period between regular senior staff meetings the following activities ought to occur:

a. CapacityWare™ Update. At the end of each week, the *CapacityWare™* Administrator ought to have updated all the files of those events that have occurred during the last week and those due to occur in the coming weeks. This vigilance will enable a continuous tracking of important details that impact progress.

b. Senior Staff Meeting Regular Report(s). As the agenda items for regular staff meetings are being created, time ought to be scheduled for recurring reports on the progress of chartered Teams. *QWLC* recommends that the reports be delivered by a combination of the Senior Staff Sponsor for the specific team and a non-supervisory Team member (See the Monograph - Involving Non-supervisory Front-line Workers).

c. Senior Staff Meeting – Team Recommendation Presentations. When a Team is ready to present recommendations, either time in a regularly scheduled staff meeting or a special meeting of the Senior Staff ought to be called for this purpose. See also the *QWLC* guidance pertaining to the Administration of Teams.

d. Newsletter/Publications Update. The *CapacityWare™* Event module contains a field specifically for information to be published about Team proceedings. The system can be used directly by those responsible for Newsletter/Publications to the entire staff to “collect” information about current happenings on chartered Teams. The *CapacityWare™* Administrator or responsible Team Member must create a brief newsworthy “article” (normally one or two paragraphs) suitable for publication.

D. Top Ten Most Frequent Mistakes.

1. Failure to treat *Quality of WorkLife* data collection efforts as an on-going workforce-health requirement. Living systems fall into disarray automatically if attention is

not paid to potential capacity-loss issues (Review the concept of entropy, and the application of Hubble's Law to organizational dynamics).

- a. The cost of lost capacity is normally far more severe than the cost of recovery (See the monograph - The Cost of Recovering Capacity).
- b. The longer lost capacity is left unattended, the more difficult it is to recover.
- c. The senior management team is often the last group to know that losses are occurring and therefore the least likely to sponsor early recover efforts.

2. Failure to believe that the same leaders and managers who helped create the culture will need assistance in significantly improving that culture. Leaders often make the mistake of believing that managers and supervisors “own” the culture of their work groups and therefore can change that culture to a more productive capacity without assistance.

- a. The cultural capacity of a work group is “owned” by those IN the group and not those who MANAGE the group.
- b. Managers and supervisors may have influenced the creation of low capacity performance practices through the exercise of hard-to-break “habits” that are not easily altered without outside help.

3. Failure to effectively and officially charter Teams to correct systemic issues surfaced by survey data. Officially chartering Teams to further investigate and help solve organizational problems surfaced by data collection efforts is an essential ingredient in improving an organization's performance.

- a. Swift chartering and careful periodic monitoring will provide the results desired.
- b. Charters must define the scope of investigative and corrective options without providing so much detail that innovative alternatives are lost.
- c. Teams ought to remain “leaderless” until the Team develops and is able to create its own structure.

4. Failure to keep minimal Team meeting records. Records allow senior managers to judge the effectiveness of the Teams they have chartered.

- a. *CapacityWare*TM provides a balanced set of records and reports that take minimal effort with maximum focus on important details.
- b. Senior managers must hold Teams accountable for improvements based on the records kept of progress made.

5. Failure to integrate data collection and follow-through activity into the routine of conducting business. If workforce measurements are considered “extra” rather than part of the routine of the way the organization operates, far less attention will be paid to finding and fixing problems that rob the organization of its ability to innovate and synergize. Innovation and synergy are required to get more done with fewer people, and to solve problems before they have menacing results.

a. Workforce capacity development is every leader's, manager's, and supervisor's job – in fact it is a responsibility of every member of the workforce.

b. Keeping capacity development visible is every bit as important as keeping other production and sales trends visible.

6. Failure to calculate the value of NOT correcting the dysfunction embedded in the organization culture. Collecting data that will help determine the capacity of a workforce and the cost to restore “Ideal” capacity if it is lacking helps establish organizational priorities.

a. Value-based measurements allow responsible senior managers to weigh the merits of corrective actions over time with ever-present alternative demands.

b. Where resources are finite, the ability to concentrate on the recovery of loss mandates that the potential return-on-investment be known in advance.

7. Failure to “clinic” each Event and each Team Meeting, and apply those learnings to future endeavors. To maintain a brisk schedule of learning and adaptation, an organization must have a brisk schedule of data collection events and meetings. The “clinic” process (what went well AND what do we need to change) is the single best hedge against repeating mistakes.

a. To fall short is not as much a failure as not learning from the fall and preventing it from happening again.

b. For one Team to learn a valuable lesson and not share it with other Teams is a double failure.

8. A preoccupation with comparisons to data from similar organizations – benchmarking. Members of an organization care little about comparisons between themselves and other similar organizations when the difficulty they encounter each day at work is real and not virtual.

a. In most cases comparative data is so generalized that it is of little help at the front line where “real” issues make the difference between high and low capacity every day.

b. Front-line workers often resent the comparison of data between themselves and similar organizations more than a comparison of their data with adjoining departments.

9. A failure of middle management to sanction the data as credible. Rather than validate that the data collection effort is reliable and credible, too often managers, feeling too personally threatened by the data, tend to discount it. Continuously collecting data diminishes attempts to discount survey results. Having a long-term perspective also weakens or eliminates the tendency to install a "quick fix" and return to "as usual" operations.

a. The reliability and credibility of data among those on the front line is rarely questioned.

b. Managers and supervisors do their own credibility harm by attempting to invalidate the survey results.

10. A failure to feed back progress to the workforce on a routine monthly basis. Members of the workforce regain confidence in managers over extended periods of time. Regular feedback on what is being done, by whom, and how the effort will ultimately benefit them is an imperative to improved performance.

a. Doing too little too late is a transparent effort to "boost the numbers" on survey results and will often be met with declining performance.

b. Steady improvements and grass roots involvement by trusted coworkers are more reliable than any last-minute attempt to cajole better results.

c. An organization culture is both dynamic and highly stable. Subtle changes occur continuously but aggregate conditions shift gradually. Things didn't get this way overnight and they will not improve overnight.

Summary

All organizations use numbers to detect problems so that low cost solutions can be engaged before costs rise. Data falls into one of two categories: it is *lagging* if the data reports conditions that have already occurred, or it is *leading* if the data reports conditions that influence conditions that are not yet complete. Financial data provides a lagging warning system that costs have risen, revenue is down, or repair bills for older equipment forces capital improvement considerations. Attendance data, also a lagging indicator, may indicate that an employee requires counseling. Quality checks along the product line, again a lagging indicator, may surface errors in vital process that cannot be ignored.

Workforce capacity indicators like the *Leadership Cohesion Index*, *Quality of WorkLife Index*, or *Band Distribution Index*; all leading indicators, forewarn that a problem may exist and require attention before they further degrade conditions. These "soft" indicators are none-the-less real and reliable, yet far more difficult to resolve. One of the most dangerous myths that emerge in change management initiatives is the notion that "If people knew better they'd do

better." Underlying this myth is the assumption that once the data has been fed back to the organization change will happen as a matter of course. Nothing is further from the truth. If this myth and underlying assumption were true, the presence of weight data would cause over-weight people to become slender, the presence of tobacco-use data would cause people to quit smoking, and the knowledge of addictive behaviors would yield recovery. Something dramatic has to happen to make the shift!

To change an organization's capacity at least two commitments have to be made and action taken on those commitments: regular measurements, and aggressive follow-through. The topic of this paper addresses the first and most important of these two commitments. Without a commitment to regular measurements it is highly unlikely that a commitment will be made to aggressive follow-through. Delaying, for example, the annual financial reports to February 18th from December 31st for the sake of showing an improved condition would signal an enormous loss of credibility, and an increase in suspicion. The danger in taking such liberties with "soft" data is even more devastating.